

In These Times

INDEPENDENT NEWS & VIEWS

December 24, 2001

THE *STORIES* WE TELL OURSELVES...

BY JOE KNOWLES

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BY ROGER GATHMAN

RUSHDIE DOES NEW YORK
BY MARGARET WAPPLER

NAIPAUL'S COMIC JOURNEY
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In These Times (ISSN 0160-5992) is published biweekly by the Institute for Public Affairs, 2040 N. Milwaukee Ave., Chicago, IL 60647. Periodicals postage paid at Chicago, IL and at additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to *In These Times*, 308 E. Hitt St., Mt. Morris, IL 61054. This issue (Vol. 26, No. 2) went to press on November 23 for newsstand sales December 10 to December 24, 2001.

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Subscriptions are \$36.95 a year (\$59 for institutions; \$61.95 Canada; \$75.95 overseas). For **subscription questions** and **address changes** call (800) 827-0270.

Editorial correspondence and **letters** should be sent to: 2040 N. Milwaukee Ave., Chicago, IL 60647. Phone: (773) 772-0100. Fax: (773) 772-4180. E-mail: itt@inthesetimes.com.

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Editorial

Creeping Authoritarianism

The Bush administration has a knack for answering the knock of opportunity. It has used the war as a pretext to pass another tax cut for the rich, to increase domestic spying powers for the CIA, and to put the national-unity squeeze on an already pliant press. But nowhere is that opportunism more apparent than in the administration's efforts to expand police powers at the expense of civil liberties.

On October 26, Bush signed the USA PATRIOT (Provide Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism) Act, which grants federal agencies expanded surveillance and intelligence-gathering powers, redefines computer hacking as a terrorist offense and allows the government to hold immigrant terrorist suspects indefinitely. The Justice Department has detained more than 1,200 immigrants suspected of being terrorist accomplices. The exact number and names of the detainees have not been released.

On October 31, Ashcroft issued a decree allowing the Justice Department to monitor attorney-client conversations of those in federal detention, thereby doing away with attorney-client privilege. No court order would be needed; the monitoring would be done at the discretion of the attorney general.

Meanwhile, some congressmen want to amend the 1878 Posse Comitatus Act, which prohibits the U.S. military from getting involved in domestic law enforcement. Sen. John Warner (R-Virginia) proposed lifting this prohibition to "enable our active duty military to more fully join other domestic assets in the war against terrorism."

On November 13, declaring an "extraordinary emergency," Bush signed an executive order authorizing the establishment of military tribunals to judge foreigners accused of terrorism. Under this special new system, non-citizen suspects could be accused on the basis of secret evidence, not informed of the charges against them, tried in secret, convicted by a vote of two-thirds of the jurors and, in the case of capital crimes, executed.

Vice President Dick Cheney explained away the question of civil liberties, saying terrorists "don't deserve the same guarantees and safeguards that would be used for

an American citizen." And Ashcroft chimed in with the judgment that terrorists "do not deserve the protections of the American Constitution." Apparently, these are tribunals that will try only the guilty.

Civil libertarians are rightly outraged. The ACLU called "on Congress to exercise its oversight powers before the Bill of Rights in America is distorted beyond recognition."

Rep. Jerrold Nadler, whose district includes the World Trade Center site, accused Bush of using the attacks "as an excuse to destroy our Constitution and the protections of liberty that we pride ourselves on." He asked, "Will we rise up and assert that we can fight a war and keep our constitutional traditions and not junk them in the name of national security?"

The administration is betting we will not, and with good reason. What the administration can do (and get away with) depends on how vigilantly the news media perform their duties as public watchdogs. Mainstream media have the power to define the tone of public debate and set the limits of what is acceptable. Some newspapers, such as the *New York Times*, have inveighed against Bush's action. Yet the television networks have tended to soft-sell

"Will we rise up and assert that we can keep our constitutional traditions and not junk them?"

Bush's audacious, dangerous and precedent-setting use of executive orders to circumvent Congress and the judiciary.

We should remember that neither the Reagan nor Bush I administrations were averse to violating the Constitution to pursue covert policy objectives. But to what extent, we may never know.

On November 1, Bush, via executive order, amended the Presidential Records Act to allow any sitting or former president to veto the release of presidential papers. Normally those papers would be released 12 years after the end of a presidential term. Hence, with a stroke of his pen, Bush protected a host of current administration officials (along with his father) from any embarrassing Iran-contra revelations that could have come to light during the 2004 presidential election.

— Joel Bleifuss

In These Times

Volume 26, Number 2 December 24, 2001

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2 Letters

3 News

Washington's war profiteering, Bush's missile mania, Britain's arrested development, and truth trumps freedom on Death Row.

6 Appall-o-Meter By Dave Mulcahey

7 In Person By Christine Keyser

Diane Wilson: an unreasonable woman.

8 Back Talk By Susan J. Douglas

Y'all enjoying the war?

9 This Isn't the End of It

By Doug Ireland
... in Afghanistan or at home.

11 Why Do They Hate Us?

By James Akins
It has *everything* to do with U.S. policy.

14 WTO Woes

By David Moberg
Qatar stops making sense.

Special Books Issue

16 Stories We Tell Ourselves

By Joe Knowles
Art and lies.

17 Words for an Afterlife

By Philip Connors
Tahar Djaout's *Last Summer of Reason*.

19 Art and Shadow

By Roger Gathman
Death and painting in Orhan Pamuk's *Istanbul*.

21 Mad about the City

By Margaret Wappler
Salman Rushdie does New York.

22 Lost in Transit

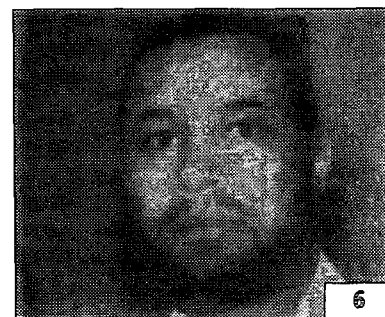
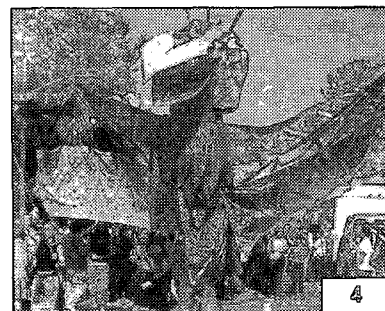
By Kabir Dandona
V.S. Naipaul's comic journey.

24 Treatment for Therapy

By Benjamin Kunkel
The Corrections of Jonathan Franzen.

27 The Lonely Tribune

By Matthew Price
Victor Serge's revolution.



Cover: Seamus Holman

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Letters

Café Totalitarians

For years I thought that *In These Times* was a rational, social democratic publication, maybe right, maybe wrong on a particular issue but worth reading. The current crisis has destroyed that illusion. The core of your ideology is a sick, poisonous hatred of the United States, its people, its culture and its political system. No fascists, not even the Taliban, are too vile or too murderous to escape your sympathy so long as they are anti-American.

On one side, most of the human race. On the other: the Taliban, the Castro regime, radical Islamists and the café totalitarian left, of which *In These Times* is a leading organ.

Joe Willingham
Berkeley, California

Misplaced Blame

Just because a statement or idea is repeated often does not make it true. In particular, I refer to the notion that U.S. sanctions against Iraq are somehow responsible, directly or indirectly, for the deaths of hundreds of thousands of children and other vulnerable persons in that country. In your November 26 issue, some form of that idea appeared in the opening editorial by Joel Bleifuss and in Susan Douglas' "Back Talk" column.

The problems in Iraq are due to the policies of the government of Iraq. Cuba has been subject to tougher sanctions than Iraq for a much longer time, but it manages to feed and provide health care for its people. Unlike Cuba, Iraq has the advantage of exporting billions of dollars worth of oil. Instead of providing for its people, Iraq devotes resources to weapons, elaborate palaces for Saddam Hussein, and maintenance of a truly totalitarian police state whose tentacles reach into every nook and cranny of Iraqi society. Iraq's terrible crisis of health care and nutrition would disappear if a major portion of its resources were shifted to those needs—sanctions or not.

I'm tired of *In These Times* and many on the left for making excuses for brutal dictators and for seeing no evil except that which originates in the United States.

Howard Park
Washington

War Realities

Arundhati Roy is very outspoken about the causes of this war, but she says little about any solutions to it, except for a lame plea to end the war ("New World Disorder," November 26). That's naïve and a cop-out. Sometimes peace can only be

accomplished by war. Yes, it seems like a contradiction. Yes, there are almost always civilian casualties. But do you think that Hitler could have been stopped without war? The truth is: War sucks. People die. That is a harsh reality.

As much as you condemn the U.S. decision regarding this war, I support our involvement in the war in Afghanistan. Unfortunately, on September 11, the Taliban left us with no other choice.

Dave Purgason
San Diego

Blessings

God bless Arundhati Roy and Barbara Kingsolver for their courage in expressing their opposition to current U.S. policy in dealing with terrorism. Their thoughtful, intelligent assessment of the current situation stands in stark contrast to the macho war mentality of our leaders, the media and much of the public.

Thank you, *In These Times*, for giving them an opportunity to express a point of view that many of us in the silent minority share. My only regret is that their ideas and recommendations are not able to reach a broader audience, given the unthinking mob psychology that exists in this country today.

Barbara Sullivan
Wilmington, Massachusetts

Like many, I have been reading the many pieces e-mailing around on the Net. They were insightful and sometimes moving, but I felt something was missing. A few weeks

ago, a friend in New York sent me Arundhati Roy's essay from the *Guardian* of London, "The Algebra of Infinite Justice." That was it, something that expressed how I felt with power, lucidity and poetry. On September 11, I was just finishing Roy's novel *The God of Small Things*.

The other night at a party, I heard that the *New York Times* had an article about how Roy was having trouble getting her political essays published in this country. This morning I open my *In These Times*, and there she is. It reminds me of why I'm an *In These Times* supporter.

Gordon Quinn
Chicago

I have found many of your articles a refreshing alternative to what I perceive as an emerging "company line." To question why is not un-American, nor is it anti-American. The honest searching for truth exemplified by your writers is needed for the very survival of our nation and for the furtherance of peace throughout the world.

Joseph Kennedy
Maybee, Michigan

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Terry LaBan



Corporate Payoffs

With "economic stimulus,"
Republicans reward their
most loyal constituents

By John Nichols

WASHINGTON—Corporate lobbyists pulled off one of the most remarkable raids on the public treasury in American history when, just days after the September 11 terrorist attacks, they grabbed \$15 billion in federal payments and loan guarantees for the airline industry.

So with that precedent fresh in mind, it's no surprise the lobbyists are back at the trough. The Brooks Brothers Brigades are crowding the steps of Congress, clutching records of campaign contributions paid, to return for the big prize: \$16 billion in tax refunds to the nation's largest and most profitable corporations.

The economic stimulus bill that House Republicans rammed through their chamber in late October is now moving rapidly toward a vote; at press time, the Senate was likely to vote on the package immediately after Thanksgiving. Rarely since the war-profiteering scandals of World War I has Congress seen such a blatant attempt by business to use international turbulence as an excuse to redistribute wealth upward. If passed by the Senate and signed by President Bush, the GOP stimulus plan would restructure tax policy to end the alternative minimum tax—a rule placed on the books after a series of Reagan-era business tax cuts to ensure that corporations make minimal contributions to the public treasury.

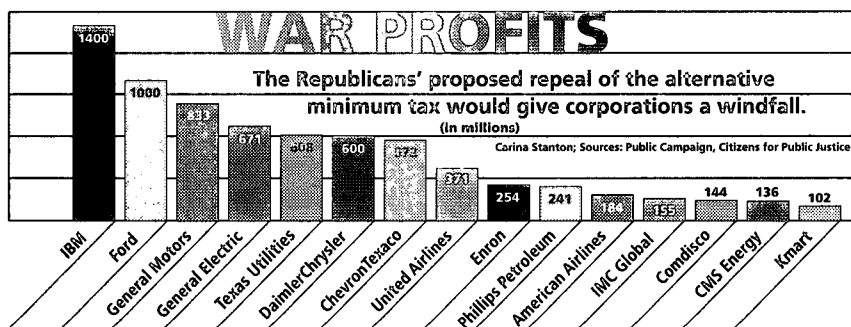
Eliminating the law, according to an analysis by Citizens for Tax Justice, would mean that "some of these corporations will be able to pay little or no U.S. income tax, forever." Worse, besides eliminating the alternative minimum tax for the future, the GOP "stimulus bill" includes a proposal to refund every cent that corporations have paid since 1986 under the alternative tax rule. The payouts to profitable corporations would be dramatic, and include rebates totaling billions of dollars to the likes of IBM, Ford, GM and GE. Huge payouts would also go to energy firms closely tied to President

Bush and Vice President Cheney: hundreds of millions to ChevronTexaco, Enron, Phillips Petroleum and CSM Energy alone. And remember the airlines that collected \$15 billion in federal aid in September? They would get even more under the GOP stimulus plan: United Airlines and American Airlines are slated for handouts of \$371 million and \$184 million each.

The elimination of taxes and direct payouts are just the beginning of a bill thick with benefits for corporations—including a tax break for U.S. businesses operating abroad. How much will the tinkering with taxes on overseas income help corporations? They'll start by saving

icans in a time of economic decline, Democrats now seem prepared to fight. Sen. Dick Durbin (D-Illinois) and other Democrats first backed a modest \$73 billion stimulus plan that provided some tax cuts but also extended unemployment benefits for out-of-work Americans, helped hard-pressed farmers and offered a measure of the public investment needed to shore up the sagging economy.

After Republican maneuvering, the plan didn't make it off the floor, despite having the support of 51 senators. While the Democratic plan fell far short of the level of investment needed to genuinely stimulate the economy, it was superior to a package of tax breaks for vast corpora-



a cool \$21 billion, and the benefits will just keep adding up as the years—and the foreign investments—go on.

Why would congressional Republicans continue to fight for the scheme even after much of the media have exposed the worst excesses of the legislation? Here's a hint: According to Public Campaign, Enron gave \$2.4 million in campaign contributions in 2000, General Electric contributed \$1 million, and Ford popped \$780,000 into various campaign funds. The list goes on.

Thus, with only a single Senate vote separating them from an end to long-term tax responsibilities, the corporations are pressing hard for a repayment on their investments—er, contributions. For big business, securing free money and freedom from taxation is job one—even in a time of terrorism, anthrax and war. As Sen. Robert M. La Follette explained when he fought the profiteers of World War I, "Wealth has never yet sacrificed itself on the altar of patriotism."

The Republican plan goes so far, however, that it has finally awakened Senate Democrats from their long bipartisan slumber. Chastened by their constituents for failing to stand up for working Amer-

tions. As New York Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton notes, "If there is any dollar that will be spent immediately into our economy, it is unemployment insurance."

What is the GOP counter to that argument? They have, of course, questioned the patriotism of senators who might choose to serve the interests of the vast majority of Americans. "You don't override the president at a time like this," warns Sen. Pete Domenici (R-New Mexico). And they are charging Democrats with dividing an otherwise unified America. "What we're going to see (from Senate Democrats) is almost a class warfare on the issue of the stimulus bill," says Sen. Frank Murkowski (R-Alaska).

Will Senate Democrats engage in class warfare? We can only hope. If they do use their majority status to block the GOP plan, they will simply be mounting an all-too-rare defense of the working Americans they should have been representing in the fight over the airline bailout, and every battle since. ■

John Nichols is the author of *Jews for Buchanan: Did You Hear the One About the Theft of the American Presidency?* (The New Press).

Missile Mania

Arms reduction doesn't mask race toward missile defense

By Geov Parrish

After three days of meetings in Washington and Texas, George W. Bush and Russian President Vladimir Putin failed to reach an expected agreement that would have amended or replaced the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile treaty. The administration has promised to abide by the ABM treaty for now despite its still intense fixation on missile defense, but could withdraw (with the required six months' notice) if talks remain stalled.

In the months leading up to the summit Putin had indicated an increasing willingness to consider Bush's desired changes, but he did an about-face in final weeks owing to the alarm of his security advisers and domestic hard-liners. Meanwhile, for the United States, getting Putin to sign off on Bush's attempts to abolish the global arms control structure simply became less impor-

tant than getting the Russian leader's cooperation on more immediate issues in Afghanistan. In exchange for Putin's support of both the Northern Alliance (Russian sent armaments bolstering the Alliance ground war) and U.S. efforts to cobble together a post-Taliban Afghan government, the Bush Administration became far more understanding of other Russian priorities: Putin's stance on Chechnya, and Russia's desire to see NATO become a demilitarized alliance.

As a part of the courting of Russia, missile defense tests previously scheduled for October—tests which intentionally and unnecessarily violated the ABM treaty—were first postponed until "sometime in November or December," and then put on hold indefinitely. (October's announce-



The School of the Americas Watch's 11th annual march at Ft. Benning, Georgia drew more than 10,000 demonstrators November 17 to 18.

ment was largely theatrical, coming a week after the Pentagon had already announced test delays for technical reasons.) The ABM treaty explicitly prohibits use of sea-based or space-based radar as part of a missile test; the scheduled tests were to use sea-based Aegis radar to track the U.S. missile launch. Critics charge the tests were planned, not out of any technical necessity, but specifically to break the treaty—thus allowing Bush to point to it as compromising missile defense research.

While the Bush-Putin summit did end in an agreement on a threefold reduction of nuclear warheads (with Bush committing to reducing the U.S. arsenal to between 1,700 and 2,200 in a decade, and Putin referring to earlier statements offering a goal of 1,500), such levels are nearly identical to those Presidents Clinton and Yeltsin agreed to in 1997. As it is, through age and attrition, experts estimate that Russia will have only about 1,100 operational warheads by 2010—but if the Bush administration breaks the ABM treaty, Russia may try to keep as many as 3,800 warheads operational through testing and cannibalizing existing missiles. China, which now only has 20 such missiles, may increase to 200 or more.

The Bush administration remains committed to abolition of the world's current arms control structure, of which the ABM treaty (between the U.S. and U.S.S.R.) and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (signed by 164 nations and ratified by 88, but rejected by the Senate in 1999) are two key parts. But while Bush has repeatedly claimed that structure to be outdated, only days before the summit he began

THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW

HEY, KIDS! IT'S THE ALL-NEW "WAR ON TERROR" TRADING CARDS!

1 OUR LEADER!
Recounts indicate that more people tried to vote for the other guy—but we don't have time to worry about that now!

17 SAUDI ARABIA!
Our good friend and ally! Also major source of terrorist funding. Is this a wacky world or what?

43 NORTHERN ALLIANCE!
Loose coalition of warlords whose infighting and savage brutality paved the way for the Taliban takeover in 1996. This is gonna work out great!

62 ARMCHAIR WARRIORS!
Commentators advocate everything from torture of detainees to use of nuclear weapons! Watch out, Osama—these guys mean business!

86 REPUBLICAN LEADERSHIP!
Bravely combatting terrorism through corporate tax cuts! In this time of patriotic unity what Democrat would dare to stand in their way?

100 INFORMATION ABOUT THE WAR!
Everything is under control. Don't worry your pretty little heads about it!

IF YOU DON'T COLLECT 'EM ALL--THEN THE TERRORISTS HAVE ALREADY WON!

warning of the danger of al-Qaeda obtaining nuclear weapons. Without that global structure, the current risk of Pakistan's nukes, or those in former Soviet republics, falling into extremist hands could be multiplied countless times.

The Pentagon is continuing to plan for missile defense tests and other apparent violations of the ABM treaty. Bush and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld remain confident that Putin will agree, explicitly or implicitly, to allow missile defense development, and that such systems are necessary to defend the United States against inter-continental missiles from rogue states. Democratic opposition has centered mostly on technical feasibility and cost. The ABM treaty is still alive, for the moment, but not because of any change in how Bush and the Pentagon view the world's military threats after September 11. ■

Arrested Development

Brits crack down on civil liberties

By G. Pascal Zachary

When George W. Bush told Tony Blair after September 11 that Britain is America's closest friend, he seemed to be referring to the British willingness to fight alongside the United States when

no one else will. But while British and U.S. soldiers settle into Afghanistan for what is likely to be a long occupation, on the home front Blair and Bush are forging a different kind of alliance—in the area of human rights violations.

In Britain, Blair's Labour government on November 13 ordered that anyone in the country linked by the government to terrorism could be jailed without trial for six months. Not to be outdone, a few days later in the United States, Bush issued a stunning executive order that would allow foreigners charged with terrorism to be tried by military tribunals—possibly in secret and outside the country. (Already, Attorney General John Ashcroft says the United States can hold illegal immigrants without trial and, because there is no law requiring detainments be made public, even indefinitely in some cases.)

While Bush's move has triggered a storm of protest in the United States, Blair has faced token criticism from a public grown accustomed to domestic repression because the jail-without-charge move revives an old British practice: that of suspending all liberties in national emergencies.

British Home Secretary David Blunkett, the equivalent of the U.S. attorney general, defended the practice, which requires that Britain withdraw from certain articles of the European Union's convention on human rights. Since Britain lacks a constitution or bill of rights, British citizens have long received succor from E.U. laws that provide many

of the due process and rights protections afforded by the U.S. Constitution. Britain can opt out of certain provisions of the law merely by declaring a state of emergency, which it has done. "We could live in a world which is airy-fairy, libertarian, where everybody does precisely what they like," Blunkett said, but "then [our enemies] destroy us."

Jail without trial was a feature of British life during Britain's long years as a colonial power. The end of World War II marked the close of British imperialism, but some former colonies, such as Singapore and Malaysia, kept alive such Britishisms as arrest without trial and rules forbidding the press or the public from revealing official secrets. Britain itself has failed to modernize, and with the election of Blair in 1997—ending two decades of Conservative rule in Britain—many progressives believed the time was ripe for British citizens to have a proper constitution and a bill of rights.

For a time, Blair seemed to support such an expansion of liberties. But with each passing year in power—he was re-elected along with his party in a landslide earlier this year (see "Alone in the Crowd," July 23)—he has shown more interest in wielding government authority than unleashing a civil rights movement.

Blair essentially has rendered toothless a law on freedom of information, for instance, and his ballyhooed plan to bring greater local democracy to his country—by forming regional parliaments for Scotland and Wales—has fizzled. The Scot-

The Charleston Five: Finally Free

After nearly two years under house arrest, five members of the International Longshoremen's Association Local 1422 who faced felony charges and up to five years in jail for protesting in Charleston, South Carolina are finally free.

The Charleston Five received international attention and support (see "South Carolina Declares War on Unions," October 1, 2001) after the state's attorney general, Charles Condon, had called for "jail, jail and more jail" in January 2000 for those protesting the hiring of non-union workers at the Charleston docks.

Lawyers for the five dockworkers filed motions in November accusing Condon, currently a candidate for governor, of misconduct and a conflict of interest in the case. Less than a week before the case was scheduled to go to trial, Condon handed over prosecution of the Charleston Five to another attorney, saying the case had become too politicized.

In a deal with the new prosecutor, the five men—Elijah Ford Jr., Ricky Simmons, Peter Washington Jr., Jason Edgerton and Kenneth Jefferson—pleaded no contest to

reduced misdemeanor charges and paid \$100 fines.

"This is a tremendous victory for the labor movement in South Carolina," says Kenneth Riley, president of the ILA local. "This great news will be heard on the docks, throughout the state of South Carolina, across the country and around the globe."

Freedom is Just Another Bird

"Here we are at the White House," George W. Bush said while pardoning the presidential turkey, named Liberty, on November 19. "All in a day's work." Thanksgiving turkeys have been excused from dinner for 54 years, in one of the more arcane White House traditions (living out their days at a petting zoo named—no joke—Frying Pan Park). An alternate turkey, named Freedom, was on hand just in case something didn't work out with the first. "And Freedom is not here because he is in a secure and undisclosed location," Bush joked to children gathered for the event. That's funny—we'd been wondering where our freedom went.

—Kristie Reilly

ish and Welsh parliaments have so few powers—and Blair has personally moved to further limit these powers—that his so-called “devolution” of power seems mere window-dressing.

Similarly, Blair backed a direct-election of London’s mayor for the first time, but when a candidate who opposed him won the election by a wide margin, Blair took steps to undercut the position. More than a year after the election, London Mayor Ken Livingstone remains essentially powerless against Blair’s 10 Downing Street to dictate official city policies.

Blair’s embrace of domestic repression enables Bush to look across the Atlantic at the “innovations” pushed by his dear British friend. The passivity of the British public—and the severe limits on judicial review in the British system—means that the national security state can expand unchecked and so provide a testing ground for repressive measures that the Bush administration might float in the more difficult U.S. environment. So has the Anglo-American alliance moved—from the caves of Afghanistan to the gutters of London and Washington. ■

Truth Before Freedom

Death Row inmate turns down state’s attorney’s offer

By Kari Lydersen

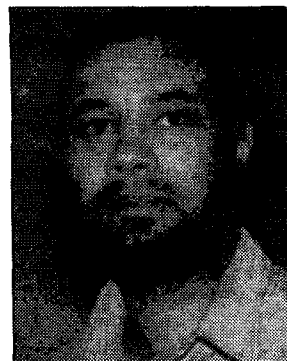
Since his conviction for a double murder in 1989, Illinois Death Row inmate Aaron Patterson has vowed his innocence and said he was tortured into confessing by Chicago Police Commander Jon Burge and his detectives. In 1993, Burge was fired from the force after an internal investigation found him guilty of the systematic torture of more than 60 African-American men.

Over the past few years, supporters have orchestrated a public relations campaign calling for a new trial for Patterson and blaming Cook County State’s Attorney Dick Devine for failing to grant new trials for Patterson and at least 10 other men on Death Row who allege they were tortured

at Burge’s Area Two headquarters (see “Justice Denied,” October 3, 1999).

On October 2, the *Chicago Tribune* reported that Devine had offered Patterson a deal: release from prison within several years in return for withdrawing his allegations of torture and saying he was guilty of the crime. Patterson said Devine offered his lawyers the deal in response to their motion calling for a new trial.

Patterson refused, saying he is innocent and will fight his conviction to the end. “How could he say he’s guilty of something he didn’t do?” asks his mother JoAnn Patterson, who has been an outspoken activist since his conviction. “Then he’d be like a dead man walking. He’d have this not only on his record, but in his heart.”



Aaron Patterson

COURTESY OF JOANN PATTERSON

McCarthy For Dummies 4.2

“College and university faculty have been the weak link in America’s response to the attack [of September 11].” How’s that? Not airport security personnel earning minimum wage? Not their reckless and exploitative employers? Not the do-nothing zealots in Congress? No, the real danger to homeland security is those damned tenured radicals. You know, the type who’s “short on patriotism and long on self-flagellation.”

That’s the judgment issued by the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, an organization founded by Lynne Cheney. According to the *Boston Globe*, the group’s report blacklists some 40 academic types for betraying Western civilization. Anne Neal, one of the report’s authors, warns of a rigid “blame America first” party line enforced in universities nationwide, stifling the expression of non-tenured patriots everywhere.

For instance, the report takes Wesleyan President Douglas Bennett to task for a letter he sent out after the September 11 attack

proposing a possible link between the “disparities and injustices” in American policy and violence around the world. He urged the university community to try to see the world “through the sensitivities of others.” How are such people allowed near our children?

Don’t Tread On Bob 2.1

From the Boston Tea Party to the lunch counter sit-ins, Americans have cherished a tradition of civil disobedience. Now to the illustrious roll of law-breaking patriots add the name of Bob Rowan of Boulder, Colorado.

A father, a husband, a talk-radio listener, Rowan had been taking it pretty hard that the Boulder Public Library refused to display Old Glory in support of the war effort overseas. He got more wound up, according to the *Rocky Mountain News*, when he learned about an art installation in the library’s gallery. The exhibit, which featured ceramic penises hanging from a clothesline, addressed

the theme of domestic abuse—but to Bob, it was just another attack on guys like him. Worse, it was all paid for with his tax dollars.

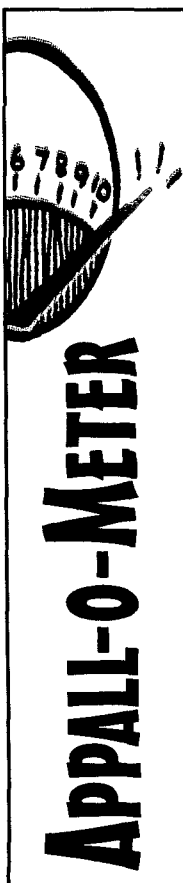
Rowan decided it was time to make a stand. He drove to the library, walked inside and quietly filled a garbage bag with the 21 penises on display. He left behind an American flag and a handwritten message that read, “El Dildo Bandito was here.”

Rowan later turned himself into Boulder police, who subsequently recovered the penises and charged the offender with a misdemeanor.

—Dave Mulcahey



TERRY LABAN



Aaron Patterson says Devine offered his lawyers, who declined to comment for this story, a "Cannon-esque deal"—referring to another inmate, Darrell Cannon, who in January was promised release in two to three years in return for withdrawing his allegations of torture. Spokeswoman Marcy O'Boyle said the State's Attorney's office would not discuss any ongoing negotiations.

Patterson's lawyers filed a motion for a new trial this summer based on new

evidence of systematic torture and are now awaiting the state's response. No physical evidence links Patterson, an admitted street gang leader, to the 1986 stabbing murder of Vicente and Rafaela Sanchez, an elderly couple who allegedly ran a fence for stolen goods from their South Side Chicago home. Patterson's conviction was based largely on an unsigned confession, which he says detectives fabricated, and the testimony of a 16-year-old girl who

has since recanted her testimony in several affidavits.

A coalition of attorneys and activists has called for a federal special prosecutor to investigate the claims of torture at Area Two. One of the reasons Patterson says he refused the deal is that he wants the officers accused of torture to testify if he is awarded a new trial. "I want to put these police officers on the stand, now that we know all about their prior history," he says. "This is a golden opportunity." ■

An Unreasonable Woman

By Christine Keyser

Diane Wilson readily admits that she is "nobody particular." But this fourth-generation shrimper and mother of five has become public enemy No. 1 to some of the worst corporate polluters on the Texas Gulf Coast for her daring one-woman campaign to clean up toxic pollution.

Wilson has become a heroine to environmentalists for her unabashed commitment, courage and shock tactics in defending her low-income fishing community from corporate polluters—the likes of DuPont, Union Carbide and Alcoa Aluminum.

"Anyone can do this," Wilson told a sell-out crowd to thunderous applause at the recent Bioneers conference in Northern California. "There's a lot more people are capable of than they think. It's the reasonable woman who adapts herself to the world, and the unreasonable woman who adapts the world to herself. And I'm telling all you women to be unreasonable!"

Wilson first became a toxic avenger in 1989 after the Environmental Protection Agency published its first Toxic Release Inventory. Buried in the local newspaper was a small news story revealing that Wilson's own Calhoun County, with a population of just 20,000, led the nation in emissions of polyvinyl chlorides and other toxic chemicals. According to the EPA report, the chemical industry discharged millions of pounds of PVCs a year into Calhoun County waterways, causing a collapse of

shrimp and other fisheries. As a girl growing up in the town of Seadrift and shrimp fishing with her father, Wilson recalls hauling 2,500 pounds of shrimp a day from San Antonio Bay. Today, shrimpers are lucky to catch 100 pounds a day. "I was so outraged," Wilson recalls. "We're not known for nothing down here. That report galvanized me."

At the same time, Formosa Plastics, the county's leading polluter, was planning a \$1.7 billion expansion, the largest by a chemical company in Texas history. In response, Wilson embarked on a campaign to organize her fellow Seadrift citizens, recruiting local Vietnamese fishermen to her cause. She pored over EPA reports, filed a federal lawsuit against Formosa Plastics, and staged hunger strikes to pressure the company to meet her demands.

She also worked with a Houston-based clean technology company to disprove industry claims that zero discharge of toxic emissions was impossible to achieve. "I spent my life on the water," she explains, "so I had this strong identity with that bay. I had a passion for the bay—I was a part of it. And I wasn't fixing to give up on it."

Finally, Wilson realized she had to do something outrageous to focus public attention on Formosa's illegal discharges. So she decided to sink her beloved 40-foot shrimp boat, the *Seabee*, on top of Formosa's illegal wastewater discharge pipe in the bay. "Everything depended on the ecosystem," Wilson says. "That's one of our treasures—our Texas Gulf Coast. And we sacrifice it. So I was willing to sacrifice my boat."

She embarked at midnight but was apprehended in the middle of the bay by three Coast Guard cutters who had been tipped off by her own cousin, whom Formosa Plastics had secretly hired to spy on her. But her daringness

paid off, finally mobilizing Seadrift fishermen to defend one of their own. The Seadrift fishermen raised such a ruckus, focusing media coverage on Formosa's illegal toxic discharges and eliciting a public outcry, that the polluter was finally forced to acquiesce to Wilson's demands.

As a result, in July 1994 Formosa signed an historic agreement with Wilson, pledging to immediately reduce its emissions by 32 percent, saving 200,000 gallons a day of clean water, and to study zero discharge technologies. Fearing that it would be targeted next, Alcoa Aluminum soon followed suit, signing a zero discharge agreement with Wilson for its Calhoun County plant.

But Wilson didn't stop there. She intensified her zero discharge campaign, and in 1997 Formosa signed a second agreement pledging to work toward achieving zero emissions at the Seabright plant, operate a "sustainable" and safe workplace and ensure workers rights in the right-to-work state. Meanwhile, the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union (now PACE) endorsed zero discharge. "I think it's critical that you get workers as part of the solution. They are such powerful allies," Wilson stresses.

Wilson is now organizing workshops and training fledgling activists to fight corporate polluters in their own communities. "A lot of it is training people how to do it, teaching them the steps," she concedes. "The real effort has to come from community groups to push on a local level."

Wilson recently launched a national zero discharge campaign with other environmental and labor organizations, and she is "totally convinced" that she can build an effective national movement for zero emissions. "I can get very creative," she says. "I'm very positive. I've gained more than I've ever lost." ■



Civilly disobedient: Diane Wilson.

Y'all Enjoying the War?

By Susan J. Douglas

Hey, how'd you like our latest war? Wasn't it smokin'? We here in the Bush administration—and our friends in the media—know Americans don't care about foreign policy and, like POTUS, don't like to hurt their heads too much, so we tried to make the war as easy on you as possible. Karl Rove and Ari Fleischer thought we should present the war as if it were a fairy tale, since y'all have the mental capacities of 12-year-olds. Some of us didn't think we could get away with it, but *shee-it*, it worked!

Right after September 11 (remember how every other phrase was “wake-up call”?), there was a chance that the TV news might break out of its infotainment routine and start giving people more international news, more background reports on countries like Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, more coverage of how those A-rabs view U.S. foreign policy. But, whew, that didn't happen, except sometimes on CNN or in the *New York Times*.

Now, see, we didn't think it was a really good idea for Americans to get any other perspectives on the war, so we were real glad that the networks—well, except for some of those pesky jerks at CNN—decided not to show excerpts of how Al-Jazeera was covering things. Instead of wasting time on such drivel, ABC gave y'all a real nice story about how in these times of stress, more people are buying puppies. Now that's good journalism.

What we do like over at CNN is their cool new set, which features a big map of Afghanistan with real (plaster of Paris) mountains that CNN military analyst Don Shepperd walks around, talking about the war. With his pointer in hand, he dominates the region like a god, Afghanistan at his feet, making it quite clear that us Western white guys are omnipotent and deserve to stride the earth like giants. Great visuals.

We were real worried about this Florida recount story that was supposed to break the week of September 11 but then rightly got buried. So we were mighty gratified when the *New York Times* (usually Commies) announced

the story on November 12 with the headline “Study of Disputed Florida Ballots Finds Justices Did Not Cast the Deciding Vote.” The opening sentence says Bush would have won anyway if the Supreme Court had allowed the recount of the 43,000 ballots, so y'all didn't have to read much further. Good thing, too, 'cause a few paragraphs



down it looks like if a recount of all the rejected ballots had occurred, Gore probably would have won. But hell, no one cares about that now anyway.

Now from our point of view, the best thing about war is that it puts those feminazis—all women, really (except you, Condee)—right back where they belong: out of sight, out of mind. Everyone knows that war is man's work—planning it, executing it, briefing the press about it, talking about it on TV—so war just makes it real clear who's supposed to be running things, even when there ain't no war.

No one gave a rat's ass about the plight of women under the Tally-ban before 9/11. (To us, nailing Gary Condit was way more important than poor Muslim women being stoned to death for going out food shopping or learning to read.) But their situation works real good for us now, so we give 'em the spotlight. Just show those women pulling

back them *burqas* after our guys have gone in there, and, well, that ought to shut up the damn peaceniks.

Go look at *Time* or *Newsweek* or *U.S. News and World Report*, and you'll see American women too are back in their place, which is where our homegrown preachers like Pat Robertson and John Ashcroft think they belong. They ain't sources, they ain't experts, and they ain't in those serious black-and-white photos of the Oval Office.

Why, with constant references to congressmen, anchormen, mailmen and firemen, and with *Time* saying stuff like “everyone finds himself caught on the frontlines,” women barely exist, ain't really even citizens, or involved in none of this. Except as passive victims, of course—victims of anthrax, victims of the attacks, widows. And it's good to have some real big, public failures like Dr. Bernadine Healy, who got kicked out of the Red Cross 'cause she couldn't do charity work. See, women can't even give away money right.

Once in a while, some lily-livered guy like Frank Rich of the *New York Times* will point out that the women of Planned Parenthood have been fighting domestic terrorism for years and offered to meet with Ashcroft to advise him, but he refused to see 'em. But then that Rich guy is always a pain in the ass.

Shucks, by and large, we're real happy down here in Crawford, and we hope y'all are too. We don't hate the media anymore. We won. Let's go shopping. ■

Susan J. Douglas is a professor of communication studies at the University of Michigan and author of *Listening In: Radio and the American Imagination*.

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This Isn't the End of It

By Doug Ireland

Eviction of the Taliban from governance in Afghanistan suggests to ill-informed average Americans that Bush's military campaign against terrorism is succeeding. But a closer look commands the conclusion that the administration's obtuse and short-sighted political strategy—or rather what passes for one—is fraught with peril for the long term.

The rapidity of the Taliban's collapse was due as much to changing allegiances by Pashtun and other warlords and clan chiefs as it was to U.S. military action. The BBC has aired footage of U.S. helicopters ferrying bales of money to the interior to purchase defecting tribal leaders. The problem is that in Afghanistan, no one stays bought. Those who removed their turbans yesterday will put them back on tomorrow if they think it's to their advantage, and the ethnic rivalries that have resurfaced with a vengeance mean that Operation Enduring Freedom has driven the country to the brink of a fratricidal civil war of the kind that allowed the Taliban—who promised order—to come to power in the first place.

The Bush propagandists, with First Lady Laura as their spearhead, recently launched a campaign designed to highlight the Taliban's truly stomach-turning repression of women (probably aimed at the president's electoral gender gap more than at world opinion). But the Northern Alliance is not much better. As Tahmeena Faryal, spokeswoman for the Revolutionary Association of Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) recently reminded us: "From 1992 to 1996, these forces waged a brutal war against women using rape, torture, abduction and forced marriage as their weapons. Many women committed suicide as their only escape."

RAWA has been working against the Taliban for years, its activists courageously risking their lives to run underground schools for women in violation of Mullah Omar's lethal decrees, so their assessment of the Northern Alliance leaders' previous rule as a "living hell" is highly credible—particularly when it was documented by both Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. It's not much of an exaggeration to say that the Alliance's difference from the Taliban is that the drug-dealing thugs of the Alliance like to listen to music while they rape you and watch television afterward.

Bush's public appeal to the Alliance not to enter Kabul was a startling admission that the precipitous military campaign had undermined the administration's stated goal of a broad-based, multi-ethnic government for Afghanistan. In any event, the Alliance heeded him not. Its Tajik faction not only took Kabul, installing themselves in all key ministries, but brought back exiled President Burhanuddin Rabbani (a strict fundamentalist who supported Saddam Hussein during the Gulf War) to the Afghan capital, further violating their promises to

Bush. As *In These Times* went to press, an army of more than 1,000 Alliance troops who are Hazaras (descendants of Genghis Khan's Mongols) are ready to move into Kabul and dispute the Tajik power grab. Meanwhile, in the drug-dealing capital of Jalalabad near the Pakistan frontier, multiple armed factions have seized different parts of the city, and roving bands of militiamen are described as beyond their leaders' control.



In Afghanistan, no one stays bought.

The Alliance has made it clear that no foreign troops are welcome on Afghan soil—so much for the proposed U.N. peacekeeping force. (England's postponement of sending more special forces to Afghanistan is partly a response to these declarations and partly a sign of British disagreement with U.S. objectives on the ground, which continue to emphasize a military, not political, solution.) And the Alliance sees no role for the U.S. cat's paw King Zahir except as a "simple citizen." While Alliance spokesmen have accepted the notion of U.N.-sponsored talks about an ethnically broad-based government, they are only stalling for time while they consolidate their control over as much of the country as possible. The great prize is not the promised U.S.-British financial aid—there is great skepticism in Afghanistan as to whether it will materialize, given the West's abandonment after the Soviets were chased out—but the lucrative heroin trade, which provides 70 percent of the country's gross national product.

Enough Taliban fighters appear to have fled both to the mountains of Afghanistan and to the neighboring wild and lawless frontier provinces of Pakistan (dominated by Pashtuns) to continue guerrilla war for years. If the Taliban's control over the greater part of Afghan territory seemingly has ended, the appeal of *umma* to the minds of much of the Muslim world has not. *Umma* is a powerful word not easily

translated, meaning Islamic community, solidarity and the dissolution of the individual in the collective spirit. This ancient concept, one of the major themes of Muhammed's preachings, has been given a new and radical form as the driving theology of Islamic fundamentalism in its retrogressive rejection of modernity and Western-inspired "decadence."

The "defeat" of the Taliban by the world's only superpower, accompanied by the civilian casualties shown on TV throughout the Muslim world, has only fueled the martyr-fetish of what moderate Islamic scholars disdainfully call "*ummism*," which fantasizes a return to the glorious Islam of the Middle Ages. According to German security services, some 70,000 adepts of fundamentalist *ummism* from 50 countries passed through the al-Qaeda Afghan training camps. And that's not counting the untold thousands of locally recruited and trained *ummists* in a wide swath of the world from Nigeria (where a third of the provinces have replaced civil law with *sharia*) and Morocco to Indonesia and the Philippines. Bombs can never erase the most extreme terrorist manifestations of *ummism* around the world, but only create new bin Ladens everywhere. Dubya's lip-service wishing Muslims a "blessed Ramadan" is no substitute for a political solution to the problem of terrorism, which must encompass both a global law enforcement effort—which the war impairs—and a serious attempt to redress the North-South poverty divide.

The speed of the Taliban's unraveling also gives fresh impetus to the demands for a new war on Iraq. As National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice put it on *Meet the Press*, "We don't need September 11 to tell us that Saddam Hussein is a threat to us." She added that "we'll take care" of him "eventually."

Meanwhile, the march toward the garrison state engendered by the long war continues apace. Consider the Bush administration's plan for a new, gargantuan CIA. Under this plan, the CIA will take over military intelligence operations now lodged in the Defense Department. To the CIA bureaucrats' long history of incompetence and misjudgments will now be added the even more mentally spavined capacities of the uniformed services. (Remember the *bon mot* that military intelligence is to intelligence as military music is to music!) To this collection of dubious talent will be added the electronic intelligence functions of the National Security Agency, giving the lads at Langley control over a "sigint" establishment that claims it can monitor anything, anywhere, any time. This new intelligence conglomerate will make the old CIA look like your local school board by comparison—the agency's budget will soar from an estimated \$4 billion annually (these numbers, of course, are officially secret) to something over \$50 billion (including the recent war-related increases). And this new CIA on steroids, don't forget, will now have authority to operate domestically.

At the same time, Attorney General John Ashcroft's announced "wartime reorganization" of the Justice Department—under which the anti-terrorism campaign will be given overarching priority—is being used to gut the enforcement of laws that annoy the corporate world. The "wartime reorganization" will eviscerate enforcement of environmental and consumer protections and civil rights laws,

and emasculate the already faint-hearted targeting of corporate and white-collar crime in the suites.

These twin initiatives represent a seismic shift in the shape and texture of the federal government—yet you haven't heard a peep of protest from the supine Democratic leadership in Congress (or from Al Gore or Bill Clinton). If the Republicans are proving imaginative in using the war as cover to advance their reactionary domestic political agenda—and not just on the economic front—the congressional Democrats seem bereft of ideas.

The threat of bioterrorism in the wake of the anthrax scare has dramatically raised public awareness of the degree to which our starved public health system is disastrously overburdened and fragile, creating a political opening for a major new Democratic initiative to renew and expand the way government serves the health needs of the citizenry (as recent passage of a referendum favoring a universal health care system run by the state in Maine

suggests). If they were clever, Tom Daschle and Dick Gephardt also would take advantage of the national mood and use the threat of terrorism to insist on beefing up the inspection of our notoriously polluted food supply.

Yet the congressional Democrats are content to make the centerpiece of their political offensive a "compromise" economic stimulus package—half tax cuts, half temporary unemployment and insurance benefits—which is, as the French would say, *mi figue, mi raisin* (half fig and half grape), and which will neither stimulate the economy with its trickle-down economics nor provide anything more than momentary palliatives for hard-pressed working families hit by the deepening recession, let alone ameliorate the lot of the underemployed and the poor.

Need one explain why? Well, the Democrats, preoccupied with re-election, are playing their usual game of trying to throw a few crumbs to the labor movement to ensure its continued support while at the same time currying favor with the corporate special-interest lobbies and their ladlings of campaign cash.

Some Pollyannas on the left are predicting that the November elections—which produced Democratic gubernatorial victories in Virginia and New Jersey—mean that Democrats are back in the game for 2002. That's a serious misreading, for those two elections simply prove that the guys with the most money won. The 2-to-1 cash advantage that gave the new Democratic governors their wide margins of victory will be absent in the 2002 congressional elections. With Democrats having failed so far to develop a coherent set of popular issues to take to the country, and with nearly nine of 10 Americans approving Bush's performance, it is hard to find any reason for optimism.

The U.S. public seems ready to accept not only predations against their liberties, but a widened war. A new poll shows three-quarters favor reinstating the military draft. What has happened in Afghanistan is not, to borrow Churchill's phrase, "the beginning of the end" of the long war, but only "the end of the beginning." ■

**The great prize is
the lucrative heroin
trade, which provides
70 percent of
Afghanistan's GNP.**

Why Do They Hate Us?

Anti-American feeling in the Middle East has *everything* to do with U.S. policy

By James Akins

That the world was permanently transformed on September 11 has become a cliché. We are now trying to understand what happened and why. The men who carried out the attacks flew to their certain deaths to hurt the country they considered to be the heart of evil in the world. But the question of why they considered us “evil” must not continue to be dismissed as evil itself. If we do not understand their thinking, how can we hope to combat them?

So far the U.S. message to the world has been, “You are either with us or against us.” Will this help us find, capture or kill Osama bin Laden? Highly unlikely. Our faith in technology is boundless, but our “smart bombs” aren’t that smart. Has the bombing increased bitterness against us in Afghanistan and elsewhere in the Muslim World? Of course. Surely there must be a better way to bring peace and stability to the region.

Since the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, every American president has been faced with the “Middle East Problem.” Some have tried harder than others to find a solution, but all have excused their failure because “thousands of years” of hatred cannot be overcome quickly. Perhaps our leaders believed this formula, but scholars will tell you there is no such history of hatred between Arabs and Jews. No country in Europe—neither England nor France—has a history of tolerance toward religious minorities, including Jews, remotely comparable to that of the Arab world.

As far back as the Middle Ages—after the Arab conquest in 711—Muslim Spain, with its capital in Toledo, became a center of science, philosophy and literature. The Jewish community flourished. Christian Europe was then in the Dark Ages, and all that we have today of Greek philosophy, science and literature comes to us through Arabic translations and then, frequently, by Jews from Arabic into Latin or Greek. This high period ended with the recapture of Toledo by Christian knights early in the 11th century, but Arabic culture continued in Cordoba to the south where one of its brightest stars was the



No country in Europe has a history of tolerance remotely comparable to the Arab world.

philosopher Maimonides—a Jew who wrote in Arabic.

By the time Pope Urban II launched the first Crusade in 1095, the Arabs outshone their Christian adversaries in every civilized activity—except, perhaps, war. Stephen Runciman, the great historian of the Crusades, called them “the last of the barbarian invasions.” When the Christian knights captured Jerusalem, they killed all the Muslims, all the Jews and most of the local Orthodox Christians. When Jerusalem was retaken by Saladin a century later, the Christian knights were allowed to leave with their families for the Christian enclaves on the coast. Reading about the Crusades in school (as we used to do), I remember how enthralled I was at the accounts of Richard the Lion-Hearted and other heroes of these noble wars. The word “crusade” has entered the language as a synonym for a noble endeavor. But when Arab children read about the crusades, there is nothing “noble”; they were the conquest of Arabs by cruel, dirty and unlettered foreigners.

When George W. Bush announced his new “crusade” against terrorism, he was shocked by the reaction in the Middle East. He should have fired his speech writer.

If not history, then what explains Arab hatred of the United States? There is now occasionally an editorial or a letter to the editor in this country suggesting that it might be time to ask ourselves if there just might be reasons other than our innate goodness for being hated. This always provokes a flurry of angry responses saying that whatever it might be, it certainly had nothing to do with our Middle East policy. But the anti-American feeling in the Middle East and South Asia has *everything* to do with U.S. policy. It is not because of our democratic and moral principles, but precisely because we are seen as having betrayed these principles in the Middle East, that peoples of the area have turned against us. If there is ever to be a solution to the problem of terrorism this festering sore must be addressed—and healed.

That solution begins in Israel. Apologists place articles in all the important American newspapers claiming that the crisis

has nothing to do with Israel. They insist Muslims would hate us just as much if Israel did not exist. The daily humiliation of Palestinians living under occupation, the plummeting of their standard of living, the reduction of their lands to tiny enclaves divided from each other by Israeli roads connecting Israeli settlements and forbidden to Palestinians all make life miserable. President Ariel Sharon's plan is clearly to make life so difficult for Arabs that they will see no choice but emigration. Many have left. Those left behind have become embittered. Some throw stones at the occupiers; others have used guns or bombs. There is probably not a single Arab who believes that Israel would take these positions, would break agreements it has already signed with Palestinians, if the United States had not given its tacit approval.

The Israeli government and its backers in the United States say that all Arabs today wish to push Israel into the sea. Arafat has a hidden agenda: It's not to have a Palestinian state on the West Bank and Gaza, it's to have a Palestinian state in *all* of Palestine. This proposition is fraudulent. Destruction of Israel is *not* the Arab or the Palestinian demand. I've no doubt that Osama bin Laden would like to destroy Israel—as he would like to destroy America. But no responsible Arab leader is talking anymore of driving Israel into the sea; all are willing to accept Israel within its 1967 borders. Yet some Israeli partisans have chosen not to recognize this major shift in Arab thinking.

This is not to say that settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict could have prevented the September 11 attacks, or that it would rid the world of mass murderers like bin Laden. But a fair settlement between Israel and Palestine would dramatically reduce his fields of recruitment—both men and

money; the fanatics would lose their appeal to the masses and would fade into history. Resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would accomplish more in the war on terrorism than any number of ground troops or cluster bombs.

There are welcome signs that the Bush administration may finally be recognizing this reality. The administration, which stood idly by for months, has promised a major speech from Bush outlining American positions in rebuilding the peace process. "We are working toward the day when two states—Israel and Palestine—live peacefully together with secure and recognized borders as called for by the Security Council Resolutions," Bush said in a speech on November 10, in the first time an American president had ever used "Palestine" as that state's name. (Though the president pointedly refused to meet with Yasser Arafat, whom administration officials criticized for not doing enough to contain terrorist groups like Hamas and Hezbollah.)

Though Israel and the Palestinians may seem further apart than at any time since the Oslo peace talks began, the outline of a settlement hasn't really changed. If Israel expects to live in peace with its neighbors, it must withdraw from the West Bank and Gaza. No Palestinian or other Arab leader is willing to consider a further division of the 22 percent of Palestine left to the Palestinians. The Israeli settlements on the West Bank and Gaza, which are illegal under any interpretation of international law, must be disbanded. (A possible compromise might be for Israel to keep some of the settlements around Jerusalem and then cede a precisely equivalent area of Galilee to Palestine.)

The Palestinian mini-state must be demilitarized. Israel is by far the strongest state in the Middle East, and many Arabs

The Roots of Islamic Fundamentalism

An interview with Karen Armstrong

Karen Armstrong left the Catholic sisterhood in 1965 to dedicate herself to researching and writing on the history of religion and its impact on modern society. The London-based author has written a dozen books on religious topics, including a biography of the prophet Muhammad, the best-selling *A History of God: the 4,000 Year Quest of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, and, most recently, *Islam, A Short History*. Armstrong spoke with *In These Times* during a book tour stop in Manhattan.

—Faith L. Justice

Can you help sharpen the vague and frequently erroneous picture of Islam?

The media assume Islam is fanatical, intolerant and violent when it has a much better record of tolerance than Western Christianity. People tend to think that fundamentalism is an Islamic tradition and see Islamic extremists as the norm while ignoring or downplaying our own fundamentalists. I want to correct these distortions, because we've learned in the 21st century that it's dangerous to hold such stereotypical views of people and religion. It's damaging to our own integrity to support an intolerant culture.

Wasn't Islam founded by a warrior society?

At the time of Muhammad, the Arabs had nothing. The tribes fought one another for a few resources. The Prophet gave them a religion that united them and gave them hope. It took a long time for them to come up with

what they meant by Islam. At first it may just have been the experience of being united by the Prophet—it happened so quickly, just 10 years. But gradually people began to deepen the experience and discover what was meant by the Quran and apply it to conditions the Prophet couldn't imagine.

Islam is a religion of practice. By living a certain way, Muslims believe they develop an attitude that makes them receptive to the divine. A Muslim's first duty is to build a just world where the poor and vulnerable are treated with respect. The *jihad* is the effort or struggle to achieve this world where you learn to lay aside your own selfishness and recognize the needs of the poor, elderly and sick. Religion is highly pragmatic. Islam would have failed if people had not found that by living according to the core practices they developed that sense of the divine.

So *jihad* doesn't mean "holy war"?

Jihad means struggle or effort. Islam condemns violence except in self-defense. The Quran does allow a just war to preserve community values, similar to the necessity to fight Hitler in World War II. The permission for war is very carefully hedged with the admonition that you must make peace as soon as the enemy offers and withdraw troops as soon as possible. Muhammad, in a very important teaching, said, "I am going home from the battle with my brothers. We are leaving the lesser *jihad*—warfare—to return to the greater *jihad*: the struggle to implement the ideas of the Quran in our own society and our own hearts."



No Arab believes that Israel would make life so difficult for Palestinians without tacit approval from the United States.

think the Palestinians must have at least a rudimentary army. But Israel has reason to be paranoid, and the Palestinian state must not be seen as a threat to its existence. The final treaty could include a clause that any tank or equivalent weapon crossing the Jordan river would be a *casus belli*. Why not? It would be a blessing for the tiny new state. Without an expensive army, the economy in Palestine, which has a very high level of education and an entrepreneurial tradition, could advance rapidly.

In the first Arab-Israeli war of 1948, 700,000 Arabs fled their homes in what is now Israel; some were driven out by Israeli forces, others fled in terror. The U.N. Security

Council decreed that they should be allowed to return to their homes or be paid compensation for them. The "right of return" is considered sacred by most Palestinians. This too must change. There are now close to 4 million Palestinians who could not be accommodated in Israel. A few Palestinian leaders like Sari Nuseibeh have said explicitly that the Palestinians must understand that the "right to return" means "return to the new Palestinian state."

Finally, there is the vexing problem of Jerusalem, which must be an open city with shared sovereignty. It would have a City Council composed of Jews, Muslims and Christians to handle joint problems—garbage collection, utilities, probably police. Other matters—schools, courts, hospitals—would be handled by each community. Obviously, Jews and Arabs alike must have free access to the city. That being the case, there must be an open border between Israel and Palestine.

Is there any evidence that the United States is thinking in these terms? Some, but not enough. Is there any hope that the United States will evolve? Of course. But it will take a combination of moderate Arabs, moderate Israelis, and American Jews, Muslims and Christians to bring it about. The cycle of atrocity followed by revenge, followed by new atrocities and new revenge must be broken. Our response to the tragedy of September 11 offers just that opportunity. ■

James Akins is a Middle East policy expert who served as a foreign service officer in Iraq, Syria, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, where he was U.S. ambassador from 1973 to 1975.

What is at the root of Islamic fundamentalism?

Fundamentalism in any faith is a reactive and revolutionary movement. It's a reaction against the rationalistic, secularistic ethos of modern society. As modernity becomes established, a fundamentalist movement usually grows up alongside it. Fundamentalists feel profoundly threatened by modern society. Every fundamentalist movement I've studied is rooted in the profound terror that the liberal secular movement wants to wipe them out. It's revolutionary in that they tend to withdraw from society, create a counterculture—a sort of sacred enclave of pure faith where they can gather strength. Eventually they attack the hegemony of secular modernity and attempt to re-sacralize the world. They feel they fight for survival and, therefore, ignore the kinder elements of their faiths in favor of the more militant. Not every traditionalist or conservative person is a fundamentalist. What characterizes a fundamentalist is this embattled sense and the determination to fight on behalf of the divine.

Modern secular culture was transplanted to other countries through Western colonization. Muslims were the first to bear the dominance of Western capitalism. In building our society over three centuries, the West experienced revolution, practiced ethnic-cleansing of native peoples, exploited the poor and women and children in factories, despoiled the countryside, and produced urban slums. Now we're watching the same process in the Middle East, but worse, because they've been forced to do it much quicker. Modern ideas of democracy remain among a small cadre of educated elite—they haven't had time to trickle down or be adapted by people according to their own agenda. So what was difficult for us, is just as difficult for others and has spawned fundamentalist movements in Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism,

Hinduism, Sikhism and Confucianism. This is not just a peculiar response in a few quarters of the world.

The worst kind of Sunni fundamentalism developed in the concentration camps into which President Nasser of Egypt interred members of the Muslim Brotherhood, often for doing nothing more than handing out leaflets or attending a meeting. The Shah of Iran had his soldiers go through the streets and take the veils off women with their bayonets and rip them to pieces in front of them. In 1935, his soldiers killed hundreds of people who were peacefully protesting the secular dress laws. In this kind of atmosphere, it is not surprising that religious people experience secularism as an assault.

Is there anything we can do to bridge the gap?

We seem trapped in an escalating spiral of hostility and recrimination. It's not something where you can get an arbitrator in and sort things out because hurt feelings and prejudices and sacred values have been trampled by both sides. There's a residue of hurt. In any peace process, you have to get the participants to come to the table, and I don't think we're nearly ready for dialogue yet.

I don't have any quick fix. I know you Americans like an upbeat scenario at the end. What we mustn't do is ignore the fundamentalists or dismiss them as a bunch of crazies, because that simply exacerbates matters. Nor does it help to suppress or attack; that just fuels their sense of vulnerability. Someone has to listen first. Before we can begin a dialogue, we have to listen to the profound fears that fundamentalists express. It's a matter of extreme urgency. No government or society can safely ignore such anxieties. ■

When trade officials wrapped up their talks at the World Trade Organization meeting in the tiny Persian Gulf state of Qatar in mid-November, their concluding document was so obtuse that even the *Financial Times* called it "almost meaningless." But officials still heralded the beginning of a new "round" of negotiations to further deregulate the global economy, and U.S. Trade Representative Robert Zoellick crowed that they had "overcome the stain of Seattle."

The tortured prose from Doha merely papered over the contradictions in the global trading system that protests inside and outside the 1999 WTO meetings in Seattle had accentuated. It could prove a hollow victory, since the concessions Zoellick made will further stiffen the already strong opposition to passage of "fast track" trade promotion authority in Congress. And negotiators over the next five years or more of talks will face continued discontent with the inadequacies and inequities of global economic deregulation from a growing opposition.

The Doha meeting set guidelines for future talks but drew up no new rules. Yet many developing countries resisted the urgings of the European Union, backed less enthusiastically by the United States, for a broad new round of negotiations. To win their support, the industrial countries promised more attention to development. But despite some rhetorical flourishes, the WTO statement simply celebrated free trade, while the richer countries resisted proposals that would have opened up their markets to more products from very poor countries. "This is a massive defeat for poor people around the world," says Barry Coates, director of the World Development Movement. "The much-hyped development round is empty of development."

Developing countries scored at least one victory when the WTO clearly stated that licenses could be granted to generic manufacturers to produce drugs needed to combat public health crises (although it put off any solution for countries that could not produce their own generics). In theory, the existing agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPs) gives countries that right, but the United States had threatened South Africa and Brazil with legal challenges to their production of generic drugs to fight AIDS (even though some U.S. officials in October proposed licensing generic production of Bayer's Cipro in case of an anthrax epidemic).

"Zoellick said that it doesn't mean anything, but if that's true, then why in hell were the U.S., German, Swiss and U.K. governments fighting with such viciousness and threats and bribery to stop the statement?" asks Mark Ritchie, president of the Institute for Trade and Agricultural Policy. "They tried to stop it because it is so powerful as a political statement. It represented a coordinated non-governmental organization and developing country front that they just couldn't abide."

While developing nations, NGOs and unions could agree that public health should override intellectual property rights, they were seriously divided on other points. For example, developing nations and many NGOs opposed the effort of labor to urge the WTO to cooperate more closely with the International Labor Organization (ILO) to promote core labor rights. "We were struggling just not to move backward," says AFL-CIO trade policy specialist Thea Lee. With only modest support from the European Union (and none from the United States) on labor rights, even labor's scaled-back agenda was "unattainable," she says.

WTO Woes

Free-traders agree to a new 'round' of talks in Qatar but not much else

By David Moberg



Robert Zoellick (left) arrives at the WTO meetings

In addition, despite a congressional resolution to preserve U.S. laws against the "dumping" of exports into the domestic market, Zoellick agreed to negotiations on anti-dumping legislation. However, he rejected developing countries' request for accelerated opening of U.S. textile markets. The choice may have been influenced by domestic politics: The textile industry is concentrated in Republican states, while the steel industry, one of the principal industries endangered by weakening of anti-dumping laws, is located mainly in Democratic states. In any case, the existing textile quota system will be phased out in a few years, and at that time many smaller poor countries may find their garment and textile industries devastated by competition from China, which was admitted to the WTO at this meeting (as was Taiwan).

Most developing countries also oppose proposals to build more environmental protections into the WTO rules. But despite a declaration that each country should be able to protect life, health and the environment "at the levels it considers appropriate" (as long as they're not a "disguised restriction on international trade"), Ritchie is concerned that proposals to encourage trade in environmental products and services could be a back-door effort to privatize public water systems. And while the WTO will discuss how its rules mesh with international environmental agreements, there's a risk that the new guidelines may create trade incentives for countries to avoid signing environmental treaties.

On the other hand, the new guidelines conclude that "non-trade concerns," which could include environmental protection and social stability of rural areas, will be part of future agriculture negotiations. Agriculture, like trade in services and

protection of intellectual property rights, was a topic of negotiations that would have continued even without a new round of talks. But the guidelines suggest that it will remain extremely difficult to eliminate the dumping of agricultural products in foreign markets, which often undermines peasant farmers and domestic food security while enriching multinational grain-trading companies. European export subsidies were the main target at the meetings, but U.S. payments to farmers also subsidize exports at less than the cost of production, even though neither increased exports nor government payments have provided adequate income for small farmers.

Many developing countries, unions and NGOs also want to keep discussions about issues like investment, government procurement, and competition policy (which could open new ways to undermine government "monopolies") out of the WTO. The compromise language for the new round of negotiations gives governments two years for preparatory talks about these controversial issues before they must agree unanimously to proceed with full negotiations. But even if nations like India block such negotiations two years from now, the rich countries are already pressing many of their demands through bilateral trade deals or regional agreements, like NAFTA—which represents the high-water mark in corporate power to challenge government regulations on foreign investment—or the proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA).

Economic and social development could go hand in hand with expanding world trade, but deregulated trade on its own is unlikely to bring development—especially if the trade agreements continue to enshrine multinational corporate power and intellectual property protections, undermine public services, encourage exploitation of the environment, and discourage workers rights. But the WTO, by design, focuses on the multinational corporate interests in trade and investment, not on economic or social development. Still, even with an ambiguous and scaled-down agenda, it will be difficult for the rich countries to negotiate the deal they want without significant concessions to developing countries (most likely backed up with intimidation and threats to withhold foreign aid from those who won't cooperate).

The international labor movement, which has fought for measures like debt cancellation to encourage development will need to work with developing countries and NGOs to block expansion of the WTO agenda. That may involve more attempts by unions in developing countries to make the case to their own governments for stronger protection of labor rights in international agreements. "Long term, I think the labor movement has some rethinking and reorganizing to do on international work," says the AFL-CIO's Lee. "We don't have enough developing-country governments to stand up and publicly support even a dialogue between the ILO and the WTO."

Although some NGO strategists, like Ritchie, see great promise in future coalitions with developing-country governments, there are still glaring gaps—even open conflicts—between what unions, environmentalists and some other NGOs want and what is advocated by those governments, which often represent local ruling classes that are hardly reliable progressive allies. On the other hand, certain rich countries—especially in the European Union—support labor rights and environmental protections, even if they also back rules on investment or other policies that might prove very harmful to workers and the environment.

It won't be easy to put together a global coalition that can embrace the interests of workers and small farmers, as well as defenders of the environment, in both rich and poor countries. But without such an alliance, the proponents of corporate power and a deregulated global economy will win again in the next round of talks at the WTO. ■

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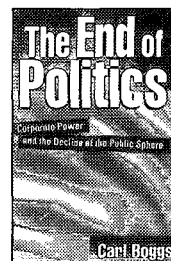
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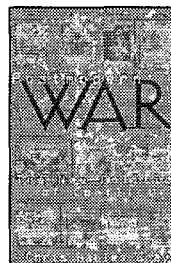
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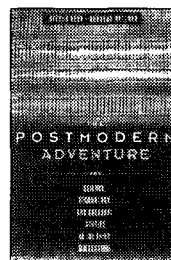
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Stories We Tell Ourselves

By Joe Knowles

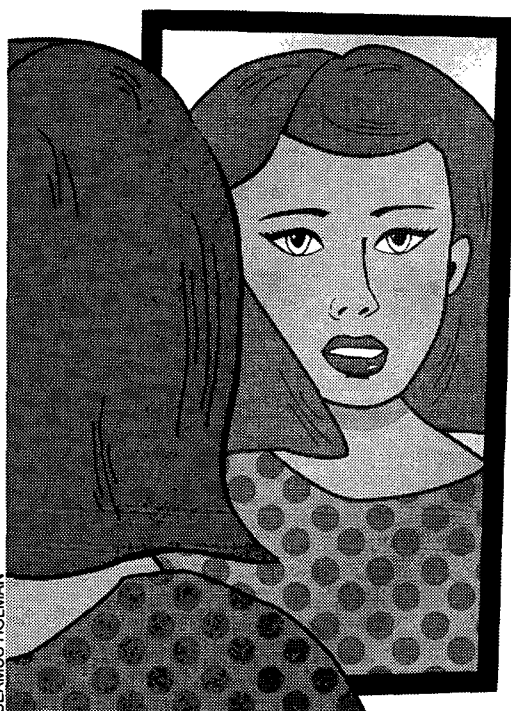
All around, invading the senses, aggressive media solemnity just won't let up. It's only getting stranger during the holidays, as patriotic war dovetails with patriotic shopping. The posture of grave high-mindedness—from politicians, pundits and minor celebrities alike—is difficult to take seriously, because on September 10 these people were deeply unserious themselves. And on September 12, having plumbed the depths of their souls, the best they could come up with were exhortations to renew faith in God and money while the war machine readied itself—or else “the terrorists have already won.”

Go to the mall to revive the economy, go to church to revive the nation's soul; the two, after all, are one and the same. Simulated gravitas is worse than straightforward triviality, and when demonstrable ignoramus claim, overnight, to be experts on Afghan history, culture and geography, one almost longs for O.J. and Monica to come back and rescue us from the new seriousness.

Leon Wieseltier, literary editor at *The New Republic*, got it right when he wrote: “No doubt about it, seriousness is in. So it is worth remembering that there are large swaths of American society in which seriousness was never out.” Wieseltier is not alone in chafing at the presumption and arrogance of media banality, which, desperately and pathetically, has been trying its hardest to be unbanal. Many of us, across the political spectrum, share Wieseltier's conviction that “a thoughtful life is not premised on an experience of catastrophe, except for the exceedingly thoughtless.”

But alas, poor Leon, the plague extends as well to you. Among the major critics, literary censoriousness has been reaching a loud and boorish pitch. For a lamentable example, see one of the stars in Wieseltier's regular crew, the critic James Wood. Responding in London's *Guardian* to an article by novelist Jay McInerney in the same newspaper, Wood

seized the opportunity to cut down an obviously vain author (ever the easy target, McInerney couldn't stop name-dropping actresses and famous friends even as lower Manhattan burned). McInerney's dispatch was surely unfortunate, but Wood's real target wasn't just New York vanity—it was the entire enterprise of modern literature itself, from Don DeLillo to Zadie Smith.



Wood is usually smarter and a lot less reckless. After first announcing an obligatory weariness—“one is naturally suspicious of all the eschatological talk about how the time for trivia has ended, and how only seriousness is on people's minds”—he almost immediately abused this disclaimer with a humorless instruction to all novelists that the time for glitter and ephemera is now over. Rushdie and babies who play air guitar? Out. Pynchon and talking dogs? Out. Infinite jests of any kind? Out, out, out!

Is it time then for retrenchment to a plain style of unadorned sentences and no-nonsense settings? Perhaps, but only if the temptations of the “Great American Social Novel” are resisted,

along with any attempts to explain society. Wood argues for “the aesthetic, for the contemplative, for novels that tell us not ‘how the world works’ but ‘how somebody felt about something.’”

Now, I love a good, contemplative, phantasm-free novel as much as the next reader. But why deny all other genres of fiction? From Wood's screed, you'd never know that Pynchon et al. are in fact very much concerned with how humans feel and the condition of humanity in general, a fact obvious to all but the most emotionally obtuse carper. Why such hostility to different modes of thinking and writing? What's so bad about a talking dog?

Atelling explanation of this mindset can be found with Wood's main stateside editor. I cheer Wieseltier's analyses of the superstitions of the Rev. Billy Graham and Oprah Winfrey, but he goes over the edge toward a sanctimoniousness of his own.

Here's what I mean. In *The New Yorker*, John Updike described his view of the mortally wounded World Trade Center: “Smoke speckled with bits of paper curled into the cloudless sky, and strange inky rivulets ran down the giant structure's vertically corrugated surface.” And after the fall: “Amid the glittering impassivity of the many buildings across the East River, an empty spot had appeared, as if by electronic command, beneath the sky that, but for the sulfurous cloud streaming south toward the ocean, was pure blue, rendered uncannily pristine by the absence of jet trails.”

Updike's remembrance contrasts the raw horror with eerie beauty, a nauseating juxtaposition that millions experienced as well: So why not write about it? Why not widen the perspective with sensibility? Say what you will about overly precious *New Yorker* writers, but Updike hit the right notes that time.

In Wieseltier's view, however, it's not a question of hitting the right notes, or any notes at all. When it most counts, he is against the music of prose itself. He

accuses Updike of trying to make devastation pretty, as if the small miracle of finding words for experience, no matter how traumatizing, is a sin—as if, even more profanely, prettiness were the same as beauty. “I do not doubt the evidence of the writer’s eyes,” Wieseltier croaked, “the weather was indeed sadistically beautiful. But why is he writing about the weather? It was a deathscape that lay before him. There are circumstances in which beauty is an obstacle to truth.”

Wieseltier ought to know better. This major flaw in his thinking exposes a discomfort with truth itself, which, as Keats said, is indeed synonymous with beauty—which ain’t always pretty. And if Yeats had been around on that day, he might have declared that another “terrible beauty is born,” no doubt earning dour rebukes. Here is evidence of a fundamental and scary problem in the culture. A casual blindness to beauty—whether in the form of comedy or tragedy, creation or destruction, whimsy or horror—is blindness to humanity itself, including its problems.

These small but daily aversions add up. Subtly and cumulatively, they grow around one’s periphery until there is nothing left to see through but the narrowest of tunnels. A lack of beauty leads to a lack of emotional intelligence: to the point where an entire nation can be outraged that 6,000 people were murdered on September 11, but not be equally outraged that, on the very same day, 24,000 people starved to death—and continue to do so each and every day. Is mass death the price of moral philistinism? You tell me whether a culture that really valued the truth would permit that kind of daily slaughter by supply and demand.

One of Wieseltier’s predecessors at the old, more humane *New Republic*, the estimable Malcolm Cowley, wrote a very satisfying little book about his adventures in Europe during the ’20s, profiling the “lost generation” of American writers. Looking back, he was acutely cognizant of, even embarrassed by, his generation’s excesses, their vanities and foibles. But he also had the maturity to see the value of taking personal or literary chances:

It seems to me now that many characters in the story, myself included,

did very foolish things—but perhaps the young writers of the present age aren’t young or foolish enough. ... Moreover, there is this to say about the foolishness of writers in the 1920s, that even the worst of it caused no suffering except to the perpetrators of the foolishness and their immediate families. It wasn’t like the statesmen’s high-principle foolishness of later years, in all countries, which has left them in office while bringing the rest of us to the brink of something we aren’t prepared to face.

Cowley wrote that in 1951, when the threat of global annihilation was still new—and no matter how much the fantasy of American political life and culture tries to wish it away, that distinct possibility still has not vanished.

But while a mad world spins on lies, writers merely try to tell a story. There’s something funny about literature: If it works, it has a way of opening up new vistas of common humanity,

experience and endeavor, whether that was the author’s intention or not (usually it’s not). But if the novel doesn’t work, if it rings false instead of true, it’s merely a bad novel, that’s all. A bad novel cannot be put to any use—not even as propaganda, for then it appears to everyone as doubly ridiculous. There is no equal and opposite reaction to bad literature, as there is in so much else of the universe.

We can tell ourselves stories, with nothing to lose and everything to gain, or we can tell ourselves lies, with existence itself at stake. There is a vital difference. In that spirit, *In These Times* offers the following six essays about five contemporary storytellers, and one from a bygone era. The approach is anything but comprehensive. The critics assembled here have some informed ideas about fiction, about what works and what doesn’t. But just remember, we’re only human. ■

Joe Knowles is culture editor of *In These Times*.

Words for an Afterlife

By Philip Connors

On May 26, 1993, Tahar Djaout got into his car and prepared to drive to his office at *Ruptures*, a weekly newspaper he had founded with two colleagues in Algiers. When a stranger approached the car, Djaout

The Last Summer of Reason

By Tahar Djaout
Ruminator Books
145 pages, \$19

rolled down his window, apparently believing the man needed help or directions. Instead, the man fired three shots at Djaout’s head, pulled his body from the car and drove off in it, making Djaout the first of 57 Algerian journalists murdered in a four-year period.

No one was ever convicted of Djaout’s murder, although an armed Islamist group was assumed responsible. Two suspects were shot and killed by police in the days after the murder. A young man who initially confessed

to being an accomplice of the killers recanted his testimony at trial, saying he had been tortured by his interrogators. Another man charged with ordering the killing was found not guilty. *Ruptures*, a newspaper with a circulation of 70,000, folded when its co-founders fled to Paris.

Djaout had been an eloquent and prolific writer. At the time of his death he had published a book of stories, four novels, four books of poems and countless pieces of journalism. A figure of elegance and sophistication, he relished the complexities of his mixed cultural heritage: Arab, Berber and French. (He preferred to write in French.) He was committed to democracy and freedom of expression, two values that suffered gravely after the Algerian military coup of 1992, which led to the cancellation of scheduled elections. Since then as many as 80,000 Algerians have been killed in a civil war between Islamist rebel groups and the government.

Djaout seems to have seen it all coming. In *The Last Summer of Reason*, a novel found in manuscript form among his papers after his death, he created a dark fable of life in an unnamed city, where the streets are terrorized by the Vigilant Brothers—a group of fundamentalist thugs committed to imposing their astringent beliefs on the populace.

Over the course of this slender novel, Djaout's protagonist, Boualem Yekker, suffers the dissolution of his cherished world. He owns an eclectic bookstore in a culture where people increasingly seek life's meaning in only one "holy" book. Something of a sensualist, he sees the women of his neighborhood cloaked in ugly black garments to obliterate their sexual appeal. Strangers torment him with rocks, threatening letters, threatening phone calls. His wife and children, fearing for their lives, abandon him and succumb to the ruling dogma. Customers fear entering his bookstore, fear even pausing to look through the window.

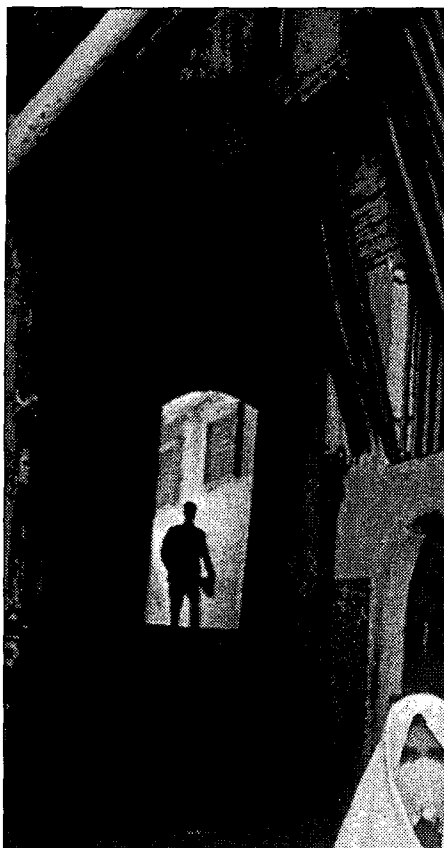
The Vigilant Brothers perpetrate all of this with the zeal of men who believe only they know the one true way to eternity. They have created a "logic that causes blood to flow out of passion"; they have "claimed the right to destroy people in order to save their souls." Boualem cannot believe "that God should have to put up with such despicable representatives."

Boualem's memory becomes the only respite from the alkaline bleakness of the present—and it is this insight that makes Djaout's novel so powerful. On the flip side are the Vigilant Brothers, for whom life on earth is a mean and ugly prelude to an imagined future in God's kingdom; to exalt in sensual pleasures now, in food and drink and song and love, is to insult God's omnipotence. The Brothers deliberately sully the here and now to burnish the attractions of the afterlife.

Boualem, able neither to believe in such an afterlife nor to tolerate the world as it is being remade, can only move in the opposite temporal direction: "With the future crossed out, the past has become an obsession. ... It is like a Garden of Eden that radiates through the darkness. At night, it keeps its disciples awake, like an agonizing pain. A pain from which you cannot

escape by finding refuge in the future, because the future is a closed door."

In this way, the present is leached of beauty, leached even of meaning. This is precisely the fanatics' goal, one in



THOMAS J. ABERCROMBIE

which even their opponents become, by retreating into nostalgia and reminiscence, subtly complicit—"barricaded behind a bulwark of hypocrisy and artificial piety."

Slowly, Boualem feels himself beginning to cleave in two—one half of himself clinging to memories he fears he can no longer trust, the other half nursing a paranoia that is persistently proven incapable of doing justice to the horror of reality. He arrives at his shop one day to find the lock changed and a note of eviction tacked to the door by "the committee for the preservation of collective morality." This is the cruelest blow:

Books have been the compost in which Boualem's life ripened, to the point where his bookish hands and his carnal hands, his paper body and his body of flesh and blood very often

overlap and mingle. Boualem himself no longer sees a clear distinction. He has met so many characters in books, he has come into contact with so many unforgettable destinies that his own life would be nothing without them. It was a little through contact with life and a great deal through contact with books that ideas germinated in him, that ideals took root, that voluptuous feelings and waves of pleasure or anger ran through his trembling body, leaving lasting traces behind.

The men who murdered Djaout understood these powers, understood that the best literature is the mortal enemy of totalitarianism. One Islamic guerrilla admitted that Djaout "wielded a fearsome pen"—fearsome because Djaout took great care and pleasure in the cultivation of a voluptuous prose style. His work asserted the primacy of the individual imagination, and to the enemies of secular democracy, that was intolerable.

But this book will long outlive them. In his introduction, Nobel Prize winner Wole Soyinka calls the novel a "posthumous allegory ... a humanistic testament, beamed at the complacent conscience of the world." It is also a version (for we ought to admit there are many) of a beautiful and haunting afterlife—the permanent fruit of a mind committed to its art in defiance of terror. It is all the more heartbreaking for its prescience; in the very last line of the novel, Boualem wonders: "Will there be another spring?"

In response to Djaout's assassination, the Carrefour des littératures in Strasbourg published a petition that called for the creation of an organization to aid persecuted writers. The response was swift. More than 300 writers signed in a matter of days, and one year later the International Parliament of Writers was formally established. Salman Rushdie wrote its charter, which he titled "A Declaration of Independence." He became its first president and was followed by Soyinka and now Russell Banks.

The IPW's main program is called Cities of Asylum. It offers endangered or exiled writers a home, a stipend and aid in obtaining passports and visas from adoptive countries. The group also publishes twice a year a journal called *Autodafe*, the second issue of which is

now available in any bookstore worth its salt. It includes fiction, essays and poems that grapple with issues of human rights and artistic freedom, and is published simultaneously by nine different publishers in eight languages (in the United

States by Seven Stories Press). Read more about this worthy group's activities at <http://www.autodafe.org>. ■

Philip Connors is editor of the literary magazine Croonenbergh's Fly.

Art and Shadow

By Roger Gathman

The Ottoman sultans prohibited the use of the printing press among their Muslim subjects until 1729, when Ibrahim Muteferrika, a Transylvanian convert, was given permission to operate one. Among the first

My Name Is Red
Orhan Pamuk
Knopf
417 pages, \$25.95

books printed, according to Philip Mansel's encyclopedic *Constantinople*, was a treatise that posed the question: "Why do Christian nations, which were so weak in the past compared to Muslim nations, begin to dominate so many lands in modern times and even defeat the once victorious Ottoman army?"

Variants of this question echo throughout Turkish history. Since the overthrow of the sultan's court after World War I and Atatürk's gigantic project of modernization, Turkey has officially defined itself as other than the West's Other. It is a project with mixed results to say the least, most recently in the Turkish effort to join the European Union. Given the 500 years of European history in which the Turk was the supreme Other (to "turn Turk," in Shakespeare's time, was to go bad), Turkish Westernizing can be seen as either a comedy of crossed purposes or a tragedy of misjudged projects.

Orhan Pamuk, Turkey's most famous novelist, does comic or tragic equally well. He wrote a novel, *The White Castle*, about the historic moment when the "once victorious Ottoman army" ceased to beat the West, the period around the naval battle of Lepanto (off the Greek coast) in 1571—a battle famous in the history of the novel for the participation of Cervantes, who was wounded in the

breast and hand by the Turks, and in world history for marking the defeat of Ottoman expansion as a sea power. For those historians who believe empires, like fevers, are always either rising or falling, Lepanto marks the beginning of the fall, the slow descent from hegemon to the 19th century's "sick man of Europe."

Pamuk's novel not only plays Cervantian games with narrators and identity, it also takes up the subject of the Ottoman court's fatal refusal to understand experimental science as anything more than a method for making various court toys and baubles. As in Europe, science was considered an intolerable threat to religion; but unlike Europe, where scientists could maintain themselves in alliances with such countervailing powers as the urban bourgeoisie, the independent aristocracy and proto-capitalist societies like Holland, the power structure in the Ottoman empire was top-down, with political power emanating exclusively from factions in the sultan's court. If there was any countervailing force, it came from popular religious movements that were even more hostile to the innovations of reason.

Pamuk has returned to this period in *My Name Is Red*. The bad news is that his translator, Erdag Goknar, has considerable problems finding English equivalent of Pamuk's Turkish. Sometimes, in desperation, he dashes through the boundaries between the languages with an unsorted semantic mass tucked like dirty laundry under his arm, to be deposited on the English side for the reader to make sense of as he can. The good news is that this novel has scale, daring and fun, a rare fusion of qualities. Like Calvino or Rushdie, Pamuk has the popular touch even when he is being most experimental.

My Name Is Red begins with the murder of a guildler, Elegant Effendi ("effendi" is a title of respect), whose corpse is tossed into a well in a burnt-out section of Istanbul. The guildler was working for a semi-retired court official, Enishte Effendi, or "Beloved Uncle," on a special album for Sultan Murat III, the great patron of Istanbul miniaturists, to commemorate the thousandth year of the Muslim calendar.

Enishte is hiring illuminators from the atelier of Master Osman to create the pictures, and this is creating friction. Master Osman detests the new "Frankish" style of picture, with its realism and perspective, its groupings of persons or objects determined less by their moral status than their pictorial interest. Not only does this violate the canons of the great Persian schools of miniaturists, it leans in the direction of blasphemy. Meanwhile, Master Osman knows that rumors of Enishte's project have reached Nusret Hoja, a popular preacher who has been stirring up hatred

What happened when painting in perspective (or painting at all) could be fatal?

toward painters. Enishte's surrender to Frankish standards will, Osman thinks, endanger *all* painters.

Enishte's nephew, Black, chooses this moment to return to Istanbul. Becoming involved in his uncle's project, he is Pamuk's de facto detective. Black's secret agenda is to marry Shekure, Enishte's beautiful daughter. Shekure is living with her father, having run away from her brother-in-law Hasan's house when Hasan made advances to her. Her husband, a soldier, marched off four years ago against the Persians and never returned. Shekure has two children and an uncertain social status—she is a demi-widow. Her status can be resolved by a divorce, which is allowed by some Islamic sects in the city, and remarriage. But she wavers between Black, handsome but irresolute, and Hasan, dour but forceful.

The fun in the story is the way it is told. Pamuk makes use of the technique

of the Karagoz, the traditional Turkish shadow theater. Karagoz means "black eye," and surely it is no coincidence that our hero is named Black. Just as shadow figures exist frontally, confronting an audience, so, too, every chapter is narrated by one of the characters who turns to the reader as though to the audience. But shadow play exists on two planes—on the plane of the cut-out figure, and on the plane of the screen upon which the shadow is cast.

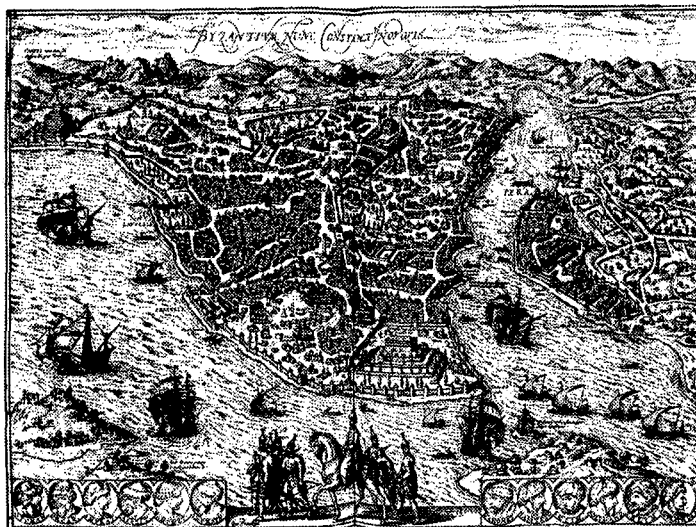
In the same way, the book has both a theatrical and a novelistic plane, with the characters moving from one to the other. The theatrical effect is struck from the very beginning, when the corpse of the murdered man tells us about the murder. He also tells us matter-of-factly what death is like. This is something a 17th-century audience would want to know. In fact, the murdered in this book are all very explanatory about that last journey.

Using this technique, Pamuk can tell us stories not only from the angle of the characters, but from the viewpoint of a tree, a dog, a gold coin and other of Enishte's illustrations. Copies of these pictures are hung up in a coffee house and used as props for fables by a ribald, anti-clerical storyteller. The characters' consciousness of the reader implies a fuller, private self-consciousness, a depth to the front they are showing, formed in the denser mesh of everyday life.

This is the plane of novelistic action, and here Pamuk touches on the Dostoevskian, particularly the Dostoevsky of *Crime and Punishment*. Just as Dostoevsky makes St. Petersburg a living embodiment of Raskolnikov's inner labyrinth, so, too, 17th-century Istanbul—with its wooden houses intentionally designed to protect the female face from the stray male gaze, its higgledy-piggledy streets, its coffee houses and dervish lodges, its ethnic quarters with their sudden riots—becomes, in the murderer's mind, an afterlife landscape, an allegory of divine alienation. An ominous atmosphere hangs over this city even for the other characters, like Black and Shekure.

There are a great many scenes set in gloomily lit chambers, lending an appropriately expressionistic backdrop to crimes that are as much metaphysical as they are physical.

Although Black is our hero, the basic tone of this novel is keyed to the murderer. He takes crime to a higher level by pondering the connection



Constantinople, from *Civitates Orbis Terrarum*, 1576.

between an artistic style and the clues that would expose him as a murderer. That an artist would aspire to a personal style is a given for Enishte's Frankish painters, but presents a series of puzzles for Islamic artists: Was a personal vision, expressed in pictures that copied reality, blasphemous pride? Wasn't it dangerous to give perspective such extended sufferance? Wasn't painting from the perspective of an unclean thing—say a dog—unclean itself? Was perfection to be found in individuality, or the complete lack of it—an emptying out before God? As the murderer puts it:

Let it not be forgotten that in the Glorious Koran, "creator" is one of the attributes of God. It is Allah who is creative, who brings that which is not into existence, who gives life to the lifeless. No one ought to compete with Him. The greatest of sins is committed by painters who presume to do what He does, who claim to be as creative as He.

Pamuk has picked a good period to pursue these issues. His painters are

intertextually tucked between Vasari, whose famous second edition of *Lives of the Painters*, in 1565, serves as the template of artistic mythology in the West, and Ahmad Qadi, a Baghdadi whose *Calligraphers and Painters*, in 1606, is the major source of those anecdotes about the master miniaturists of Herat that Pamuk sprinkles through the pages of his novel.

While the founding myths of Western art are of ancient Greek painters so skillful at mimicry as to deceive birds, beasts and men with their paintings, and while the rivalry between the immortality conferred by art and that conferred by religion was muted, the Islamic tradition of representation was necessarily more indirect. It had to absorb those sayings of Muhammad, contained mostly in the al-Bukari, a text second to the Quran in sacredness, which conflate painting with magic. In particular, one sentence was evoked

continually against painters: "Whoever makes a picture in this world will be asked to put life into it on the day of Judgment, but he will not be able to do so." This ominous stricture hangs over Pamuk's painters like a sword.

Pamuk leaves the discrepancy between style and perfection, individuality and tradition, unresolved. When Murat III died, succeeding sultans discouraged both the mechanical contrivances of the infidels and any work of representation that violated the most literal interpretation of Muhammad's word. As Shekure, who has the last word, puts it: "The conflict between the methods of the old masters of Herat and the Frankish masters that paved the way for quarrels among artists and endless questions was never resolved. For painting itself was abandoned."

As so often in Ottoman history, the sultan's court responded to the political and cultural challenge of the West with repression and inertia. ■

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Mad about the City

By Margaret Wappler

It wasn't so long ago that New York City seemed to throb with an indefatigable pulse of trivial ephemera, but reading *Fury*, Salman Rushdie's eighth novel, makes that city feel ever more distant. Yet if you're feeling sentimental about the New York that once was—and will never be again, as some

Fury

By Salman Rushdie
Random House
259 pages, \$24.95

have gloomily declared—beware that *Fury* won't take you back to a fun, blitzed-out version of the city that never sleeps. Actually, it doesn't sum up New York at all, unless you think the Big Apple is merely and only a vibrantly vapid, regurgitative and derivative mess.

Professor Malik Solanka, creator of a popular animated BBC program featuring a group of lofty-minded, intellectually curious dolls (the princess of them dubbed "Little Brain"), has escaped to New York, leaving behind a patient-to-saintly-proportions wife and idolizing son. He prays for New York to swallow him whole with its furious media obsession and caustic anonymity. It's a fury not unlike the nameless one that sent him fleeing his comfortable London surroundings; Solanka awoke startled one night holding a knife above his wife and child. Feeling he was no longer in control of his behavior, he left with little explanation.

Rushdie draws many parallels between Solanka's creations, which eventually spin out of his control due to rampant success, and Solanka's lack of control over himself, or more precisely, his varied reinventions of self. First, Malik, or "Solly," was full ivory-tower material, then he became a family man, and, finally, attained mainstream success, antipode of his former self. How to reconcile the needs of all three? Running away from

them seems to be Solanka's cowardly but sympathetic response.

But Rushdie ultimately abandons this war of the self in favor of chasing the tail of something far more ubiquitous yet even more elusive. For one, he tries to pin down the very nature of pop culture, prompting readers all over the world to cover their eyes and wait for the inevitable collision: It's typically not a pretty thing when a literary writer of a certain stripe tries to discern the popular vagaries of P. Diddy or Lara Croft. And Rushdie is no different, especially considering he seems to completely disdain them. But could it be, as they say, that hate is the closest emotion to love?



He's in a New York state of mind.

It appears the author behind such works as *Midnight's Children* and *The Satanic Verses* brought pop culture into the mix to sneer at its woeful insipidness and short-term memory while also borrowing some of its best tricks. Rushdie doesn't know whether to condemn the culture and our fascination with it as intellectually bankrupt, or to throw up his hands and pronounce it merely all good fun. Some of the names, events (large and small) and whateverisms that Rushdie name-drops in an attempt to create a uniquely American tapestry: Jar Jar Binks, Max Headroom, Charlie Rose, Tiger Woods, SUVs, Zagat's, I Can't

Believe It's Not Butter, Amazon.com, plus a whole host of other stars so famous we know them on a first-name basis (Gwynnie, Tom and Nic, et cetera).

It's not unreasonable to suggest that most of us read to escape just the type of torrential maelstrom Rushdie inflicts upon us throughout *Fury*. While an author should feel no hesitation to pull in any influence, whether deemed high or low, if Andrew Cunanan and Monica Lewinsky are going to storm the set of a novel, they better be there for a damn good reason. But Rushdie never makes a good case for why these blighted characters need to be on the scene. He seems to have them on hand chiefly to impress us that he can be part of the literary set and know what the kids like, too.

Worst of all, he tries to find genuine parallels between his creation and tabloid fascinations like Elián González: "Solanka felt more than ever like a refugee in a small boat, caught between surging tides: reason and unreason, war and peace, the future and the past. Or like a boy in a rubber ring who watched his mother slip under the black water and drown." It may be an impressive hat trick to empty two years worth of *People* magazine into your novel, but is it worth it?

Rushdie seems so inspired by pop culture's way of juggling several middling crises and curiosities at once that he clogged *Fury* with several middling and curious subplots. And some quite good ones that you wish could've been salvaged for their own book: In the best one, Solanka meets his match in Mila Milo, a dead ringer for his star creation, Little Brain. Mila is one of the book's most fully realized characters; manipulative and icily intelligent, she is Rushdie's most successful attempt to elucidate the clutches of pop culture. This young woman who hangs around on stoops in Solanka's Manhattan neighborhood actually convinces the reader of her media savvy, though her dialogue is still harangued by a sense of overcompensation. ("I am privileged to lead the most fashion-forward geek posse in New York, and

when I say geek, Professor, I mean genius. These kids are the coolest, and when I say cool I mean hot.”)

Mila is most interesting because of her role as muse, daughter and phantom lover in Solanka's life. She tells Solanka about her powers of rehabilitation—“Some people do up houses. I renovate people.” And he takes her up on the offer. Solanka is not only being attacked by the city's relentless furies and his own inward ones, his anger has manifested itself in bursts of invective and limited but frightening exhibitions of violence—which he can't remember.

What's particularly disturbing about Solanka's violent blackouts is that New York has been recently plagued by a series of murders perpetrated by a mysterious, concrete-block-wielding madman who slinks around the city in a Panama hat and linen suit, much as Solanka does. It's the book's most fascinating subplot: Could this man have reinvented himself to the point of self-isolation and, ultimately, self-alienation? Could the very nature of his personality, his innate goodness, despite acknowledged traits of hypocrisy and cowardice, have frayed so badly as to expose the heart and soul of a psychopath?

But just as Mila seems to be getting down to the nitty-gritty of what's eating Solanka, and we're at the top of our concern for his well-being, Rushdie squelches it in favor of chasing down yet another character and subplot. This particular entry in *Fury* is downright embarrassing: Enter Neela Mahendra, a thinly veiled stand-in for Rushdie's real-life girlfriend, Padma Lakshmi, a stunning Indian model/actress/bestselling cookbook author with a scar on her arm (there's a real-life ex-wife and son back in England, too). Likewise, Neela is a stunning, scarred, multi-talented beauty, and Rushdie won't let us forget her awesome and completely transfixing powers, as he reduces men in her company to bumbling fools prone to stutters and traffic accidents.

If this slapstick hyperbole was the tone for the whole of *Fury*, it might still be indulgent but pardonable. Instead it's only awkward, especially once Neela is transformed into a martyr while documenting the struggles for independence in her fictitious Third World homeland. This is where Solanka notes the local obsession with all things

American and how success is measured by whether you're known in the Western world. “American success,” Rushdie writes, “had become the only real validation of one's worth.”

Whatever American success may mean, it seems Rushdie let a certain

definition of it get the best of his efforts. *Fury* ultimately drowns in the very thing it seems to critique. ■

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Lost in Transit

By Kabir Dandona

His face evinces much, if not all. It is haggard and dogged; not perplexed and therefore not anxious. It is, rather, the face of a man acquainted with the worst and reconciled to it.

He understands.

Closer inspection reveals rude folds of skin, ruthlessly curved parentheses about

Half a Life

By V.S. Naipaul

Knopf

211 pages, \$24

his mouth, and cracks behind the eyes. In every photograph I have seen of him, his countenance is composed, as if against interrogation. This countenance doesn't merely communicate seriousness; it broadcasts and impresses it. Disdain appears to be its organizing principle, its coherence. And, apprehending his scowling visage, the question is inevitable: Wisdom, yes, but at what cost?

His features are, by his own admission, unattractive. In a letter to his sister dated September 21, 1949 (written when he was just 17 years old), he disclosed, “I had some pictures of myself taken. I had always thought that, though not attractive, I was not ugly. This picture undeceived me. I never knew my face was fat. The picture said so. I looked at the Asiatic on the paper and thought that an Indian from India could look no more Indian than I did. My face would give anyone the idea that I was a two-hundred pounder.”

This admission is revealing not only of his aesthetic criteria (which are notably racial) but of the severity with which, so early, at so fanciful an age, he already regarded himself. Later, when he had pronounced upon the world with more such severity, critics would

say of him that he cannot lie, that he is a man for whom the truth is serious business, a thinker with graver concerns than other writers of his generation—content as they are to play games, to hold mirrors up to mirrors. Evidently, truth is dour; levity, false. Or so say our critics; and, it would appear, so assents the Nobel Committee.

V.S. Naipaul has been serious for about 35 years. During this time, he has undertaken to survey the collapsed British Empire, finding evidence of its ruin everywhere—not only in the former colonies (where one would, of course, expect to find it) but in the English countryside, too. Naipaul's eyes discern, and he sees what perhaps only he—with his hypersensitivity to decay together with his yearning for tradition and stability—can see. Empire is vital for Naipaul in explaining himself to himself. And so explorations of colonial fracture are, for him, really investigations of his own being. His poor Indian origins in Trinidad, his ambition to become a great English-language writer (and its accomplishment), his immigrant presence in the Wiltshire countryside, a presence he likens in *The Enigma of Arrival* to an act of violence on historical Britain—all this, Naipaul claims, was foreordained by the Empire and its dissolution. He is merely history's accessory.

Those familiar with Naipaul's tireless self-mythologizing efforts, those who have heard or read him plead that he is a man *sui generis*, that only by sustaining existential bruises was he able to forge an identity for himself, might object that one cannot be both inevitable and original at once. But Naipaul is inevitable in one sense and original in quite another. And any who doubt his originality would do well to remember that Naipaul practically invented post-

colonial literature—today a fecund and profitable enterprise; in 1956, Naipaul was advanced 25 pounds for his first novel, *The Mystic Masseur*.

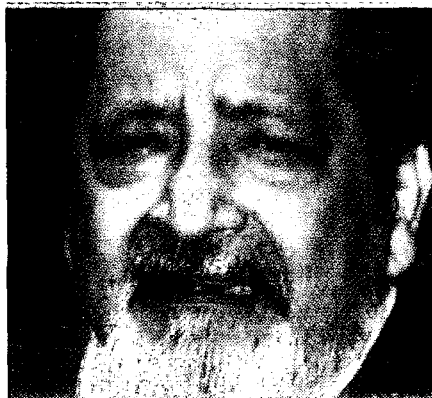
The world is what it is. Men who are nothing, who allow themselves to become nothing, have no place in it." In Naipaul's fiction, the world is dependably inhospitable. The wise acknowledge this, and those who ignore it do so at their peril. It is a simple philosophy, really, but one that nevertheless has motivated most of the fiction of his "mature" period. The lines quoted above open *A Bend in the River*, and they serve as the novel's philosophical premise. A small colonial town at a bend in a great African river, having been liberated from colonial rule, gradually creeps back to bush. European installments—buildings, bridges, schools—rot, then burn. Lives are ruined, of course; but the ruined do not warrant our sympathy, for men "who are nothing, who allow themselves to become nothing" should know better.

A Bend in the River, first published in 1979 and typical of the fiction of Naipaul's highly regarded later period, is less a novel than a treatise. Announcing a thesis at the outset, it proceeds to prove it. The characters, situations, metaphors and images are all devised to this end. They only sporadically take on life of their own, for they are too busy exhibiting some ideology or other. Take the following, for instance: Salim, the narrator, upon arrival at this town at the bend in the river, purchases an apartment from a European artist fleeing the town's first wave of violence. We learn nothing of the artist, or of her interest in Africa, or of her thoughts before flight, but just that the person who sold Salim the apartment happened to be an artist. Then, several chapters later, Salim—idling in his room—remarks upon a canvas she'd left behind in her haste to escape. It is a slapdash rendering of a modern European scene, and it is wasting, uncared for, in the African town.

Symbolism, throughout the literature of this period of Naipaul's work, is tendentiously loaded; it is instructive, and heavy-handedly so. It transports us nowhere and teaches us nothing. We repeatedly learn what the first sentence has already taught us because the narrator, wisdom's curator, knew it all from

the start. There is no discovery, let alone revelation. And so the fiction, ultimately, proves points but does nothing else.

We cannot but ask: Is this really what we need a novel for? The novel's stock is possibility. It is hypothesis, a liberation of the imagination informed (though not determined) by its author's ethics. It is a yielding to the imagination in the expectation that the imagination will



Disdain appears to be this face's organizing principle, its coherence.

illumine what plodding reason alone cannot. The Naipaul of *A Bend in the River*, though technically competent, shuns the novel's potentialities. He is a pamphleteer masquerading as a novelist.

Before V.S. Naipaul was serious, he was comic. His apprentice novels, set mostly in Trinidad, are funny and human and generous. Characters are affectionately drawn. His narrators have only a mortal measure of wisdom and, thus, may grow of experience. They empathize spontaneously, and we empathize with them. In Naipaul's comic fiction, characters are no less foolish than they are in his serious fiction; it is just that the foolishness is of a more benign hue. Foolishness prescribes their lives, and the tragedy of this fact is poignant—the more so because it is also comic.

Miguel Street, published in 1957 when Naipaul was just 25, is in some ways his wisest book. Structurally, it is rudimentary, a series of portraits of the characters of the Naipaul-like narrator's childhood in Port-of-Spain. They are people limited by education, poverty and laziness

and yet, in whom, the young Naipaul identifies dilemma, yearning and other afflictions. They are not always honest or consistent, but this does not infuriate the apprentice Naipaul (as it would the later) for, in his twenties, he understood what all writers must—that a little hypocrisy is perhaps a good thing, that it may just keep a man honest sometimes.

We watch the narrator grow from an adolescent to a young man. Or, rather, we partake in his growth, by means of empathy, and delight in his charming, precious little universe of intriguing characters. And then one day:

I had grown up and looked critically at the people around me. I no longer wanted to be like Eddoes. He was so weak and thin, and I hadn't realized he was so small. Titus Hoyt was stupid and boring, and not funny at all. Everything had changed.

The revelation is devastating not only because lost with it is an idyll of innocence, but because it comes as revelation. It isn't premonitioned in the book's first sentence; nor is it prefigured by earlier "shadow" disillusionments. Disillusionment of this kind is inevitable. Everyone knows this, just as everyone knows that "the world is what it is." But the inevitable, however banal in the abstract, can be arresting in the particular. At 25, Naipaul recognized this.

The time comes, eventually, for our narrator to leave Port-of-Spain. And though he has outgrown it, and the characters of Miguel Street no longer have a mystical hold on him, it remains his universe. He knows no other. He has invested vital substance in the place and traded influences with it. It is his as much as he is its. His departing flight is delayed, and he returns prematurely for the final disillusionment:

And back in Miguel Street the first person I saw was Hat. He was strolling flat-footedly back from the Café, with a paper under his arm. I waved and shouted at him.

All he said was, "I thought you was in the air by this time."

I was disappointed. Not only by Hat's cool reception. Disappointed because although I had been away, destined to be gone for good, everything was going on just as before, with nothing to indicate my absence.

The theme is the same as that of so much of Naipaul's mature work—the fragility of our personal universes and the inevitability of their fracture. But how much more poignant is this inherently fictional tale than *A Bend in the River*—for here, we catch (and experience) the disillusionment live. The technique is masterful, too—the delayed flight, the premature return to Miguel Street and all that follows. The only sleight in the book, and it is every bit earned.

Naipaul turned 69 this year. The literary gossips have it that he has mellowed in recent years, that he is no longer so acerbic in character, that his second marriage has softened him, and that he is on better terms with the world one could be mistaken for thinking he has worked hard to despise. Neglecting bilious outbursts in interviews, which are by now a familiar Naipaulian tic, there was reason to suppose this picture true. There were rumors of a comic novel in the works. A return to the comic would mean affectionately drawn characters again impelling and misdirecting themselves, exhibiting not ideologies but oddities and eccentricities—and we could laugh and laugh and laugh and, perhaps, learn something of ourselves in the laughter. *Half a Life* has just been published, and with it the comic Naipaul has resurfaced.

But, as with all who journey, the man who leaves is not the man who returns; Naipaul's reunion with comedy is an uneasy one. He appears now to be unsure of comedy's narrative utility, and more than a little suspicious of its ethics, its wisdom. And this suspicion keeps Naipaul from wholly committing himself to his own comic creations; characters and situations intended as comic are only half-heartedly rendered, and the fantasy, instead of animating, sags. There is, in literature, perhaps nothing worse than an aborted joke—and of aborted jokes, *Half a Life* is in great supply. As though having straightened himself by great labor and force of will for high seriousness, Naipaul hesitates before bending himself back for the circuitries of humor.

I cannot tell you how disheartening it is to read *Half a Life*. It is carelessly written. Not only is there no character development (as is the case with his stinging polemic fiction), but there are no

characters, at least no convincing characters. Naipaul's protagonist, Willie Chandran, misbegotten in more ways than the author intended, is a complete fool. He knows nothing and is incapable of learning. This much is plausibly drawn. Yet, inexplicably, every so often he makes trenchant observations about people, their self-regard and the words they use. These are Naipaul's own preoccupations, and they are grafted onto Willie so crudely, so incongruously that one begins to doubt everything in the novel.

It is also lazy:

When the time came for him to leave June and Percy to what they had to do, he was in a state. He thought he would look for a prostitute. He knew nothing about prostitutes, but he knew the reputation of some of the streets near Picadilly Circus. But in the end he didn't have the courage.

We are told nothing of the psychological traversal by which he arrived at

"the end." The decision to approach a prostitute is a rather interesting one and might reveal much about Willie's person, but Naipaul again declines to elaborate. It is all rather bare-bones, something like a child's account of his day at the beach, or Caesar's conquest of the British Isles: "He ... then he ... in the end he ..."

Paul Theroux wrote in the *Guardian* that, had the manuscript of *Half a Life* not been submitted by V.S. Naipaul, it would likely not have been published. Sadly, I agree. It is not so much a novel as it is a sketch of a novel, and a bizarre one at that. In his decision to return to comedy, Naipaul decided also to abandon his "serious" writing. And so he is no longer just a placeless postcolonial. He is now placeless in a new sense altogether. He is a man of two worlds, the serious and the comic, and he is at home in neither. ■

Kabir Dandona is founding chair of The New York Society of Causticians.

Treatment for Therapy

By Benjamin Kunkel

After *The Corrections* was selected by Oprah for her book club, Jonathan Franzen said some ill-considered things. He worried aloud that the Oprah logo would taint his book with corporatism, tag it as middle-brow

The Corrections
By Jonathan Franzen
Farrar, Straus and Giroux
568 pages, \$26

and scare off male readers. The result was that Ms. Winfrey gently rescinded her offer that Franzen appear on her show, and certain literati indulged their *schadenfreude* in the pages of the *New York Times*. Still, Franzen ought to be relieved that he didn't say publicly what, to read *The Corrections*, was probably on his mind: that Oprah exemplifies the therapeutic culture to which his novel was meant to stand as a corrective.

Franzen is to all appearances a leftist, even a Marxist of sorts. His fear,

expressed in a 1996 essay, of "writing fiction that makes the same point over and over again: technological consumerism is an infernal machine, technological consumerism is an infernal machine" seems to represent a problem with repetition rather than with the thesis itself. *Strong Motion*, his 1992 novel, culminated in an earthquake and toxic spill that were the result of a chemical company's effort to hide its noxious byproducts by pumping them into the earth. Franzen's ambition as a writer has been to connect "the personal and the social," an effort that in *Strong Motion* required an elaborate apparatus of coincidence: our hero's girlfriend was a seismologist who could lecture on earthquakes, his father a Marxist historian with a ready account of the American assault on nature from colonial times, his mother a shareholder in the reckless corporation. The shameless use of coincidence, the left-wing populism, the prodigious narrative energy—all of these were reminiscent of

Dickens, and they articulated, more powerfully than any manifesto, Franzen's wish to become our Dickens: a novelist both great and greatly popular.

No one is in a better position to grant the second half of such a wish than Oprah, whose blessing typically translates into the sale of hundreds of thousands of books. But *The Corrections*, too, involves an attack on corporate chemistry, this time of the pharmacological variety. Franzen has invented a drug called Aslan, which disables feelings of shame. The drug most potently affects Chip Lambert, a disgraced former assistant professor who wants to enjoy the good life (imported cheeses, expensive wines) and a good conscience at the same time. He loves to shop and loves to critique consumerism. Aslan temporarily suspends this contradiction and puts him under the spell of an appallingly well-adjusted young woman whose entrepreneur parents are her "best friends" and who proclaims—as any Oprah-ite would like to—"I love myself. What's wrong with that?"

The short answer, of course, is capitalism, under which the left suffers a vexed relationship to human happiness. This happiness is its goal, but it would rather no one arrive there without bringing everyone else along. It—we—also believe that unqualified declarations of self-love must be mistaken as long as consumers are condemned to the ritual of Tantalus: reaching for a marketed happiness that always withdraws the moment it is about to be grasped. For this reason the left has always been suspicious of therapeutic accommodations to the world as is, whether administered by drugs or—as on daytime TV—by hugs and confessions. Yet if the good society becomes nothing more than the daydream of critical theory, attachment to the ideal comes to seem a stubborn neurosis, not a politics.

Something like this is the background to Chip Lambert's decision to liquidate his library to raise some cash with which to treat his girlfriend, Julia, to the costly pleasures of New York living. Otherwise she won't have sex with him. Chip sensibly chooses to sell off his Marxists first:

He turned away from their reproachful spines, remembering how each one



of them had called out in a bookstore with a promise of a radical critique of late-capitalist society. ... But Jürgen Habermas didn't have Julia's long, cool, pear-tree limbs, Theodor Adorno didn't have Julia's grapy smell of lecherous pliability, Fred Jameson didn't have Julia's artful tongue.

This is hardly the funniest or most acute passage in Franzen's wonderful novel, but it does reveal that, during the '90s, the old nightmare of those Frankfurt School thinkers, and the boast of Maggie Thatcher—There Is No Alternative—finally seemed to come true. Chip "no longer wanted to live in a different world; he just wanted to be a man with dignity in this one." The other world having been canceled, dignity in this one consists of a flush bank account, the ability to afford a filet of "WILD NORWEGIAN SALMON, LINE CAUGHT" for \$78.40.

Dignity is meant to replace shame, which, therapeutically considered, is proof of ill health. How much this notion of mental hygiene differs from that of Adorno, in whose *Minima Moralia*—maybe Chip's copy can be found somewhere for \$5—we read that the mark of the healthy, undamaged individual is to be afflicted by the general unhappiness: "What would happiness be that was not measured by the immeasurable grief at what is?"

The Corrections mostly consists of long, brilliant character studies of the various

Lamberts, and the study of Chip is the first we read. We watch him collapse into an attitude long ago assumed as a matter of course by his siblings and parents: that the pursuit of happiness is just as advertised. But that is the only point they would agree on. As it turns out, one can write a good novel that makes the same point over and over again—consumerism is an infernal machine—by understanding, as Dante did, that the population of the inferno is diverse and has arrived there by different means.

Gary Lambert, the overachieving eldest child, has a beautiful wife, three precocious kids, a cozy banking job, a nice house in a good neighborhood, and a top-of-the-line security system protecting it all. But, like "correction," "depression" has several senses, and it has begun to seem, when we meet Gary, that his mood and that of market are parting ways:

He estimated that his levels of Neurofactor 3 (i.e., serotonin: a very, very important factor) were posting seven or even thirty-day highs. ... Declines led advances in key indices of paranoia (e.g., his persistent suspicion that Caroline and his two elder sons were mocking him), and his seasonally adjusted sense of life's futility and brevity was consistent with the overall robustness of his mental economy. He was not the least bit clinically depressed.

This, of course, is protesting too much, and before long it is evident that Gary is depressed, for good reason. His decision to not be, as his father was, and in the words of *Strong Motion*, "an odious Male," has undermined his authority at home, and his wife is making a final bid to destroy that authority altogether. She wants Gary to concede his depression, in which case his perceptions will forfeit their truth-content altogether and become mere illustrations of a disease easily treated by one or another serotonin reuptake inhibitor.

His sister Denise has likewise put herself in an impossible situation. Gary's wife insists that "work was the drug that ruined your father's life." Work is also Denise's drug, and incessant work as a chef has spared her the necessity of deciding how to live, and with whom. Both her yuppie boss and

his lefty, do-gooder wife exert a powerful attraction on her. When the couple breaks up, she thinks, "Easy for you guys. ... You can split in two." Her commitment to the virtues of desire, in opposition to the repressed lives of her parents, has done little but to manufacture still more unsatisfied desire.

Thus do the Lambert children, their lives designed to correct for the inadequacies of the parental model, arrive, one by one, at an impasse. Then all three are catapulted back for "one last Christmas" in the Midwestern exurb of St. Jude (named for the patron of lost causes), where they find the previous generation's domestic arrangement an even worse shambles than before. Correcting their parents' lives by their own, they also have been subjected to corrections, in the market sense, which mercilessly show up their own positions as, well, overvalued.

This account of a novel remarkable for its abundance of bright and apt detail, its living complexity, may be too schematic; but Franzen's warm sympathy for his characters should not obscure his

systematic cruelty. Thoroughness and understanding are, after all, attributes of any professionally conducted session of torture and interrogation. Franzen has composed his novel carefully, so that virtually no detail, however autonomous and right, does not find a kindred instance somewhere else in the story.

Writing about Paula Fox's novel *Desperate Characters* (in which a bite from a possibly rabid cat allows a woman to commune with the general social madness all around her), Franzen detected the woman's "strange wish to be harmed." It is also worth noticing that, for all their eagerness to be happy, both Chip and Denise deliberately burn themselves with cigarettes, and Gary receives his own self-inflicted stigmata from an electric hedge-clipper. This is unconscious shamanism, the wish for a lucid and articulate wound. It flies in the face of another precept of Gary's wife: "There's absolutely nothing useful about suffering."

Alfred Lambert, patriarch of the clan, is a child of the Depression—the economic one—and a quoter of Schopenhauer, and may therefore be taken to know that suffering is, if not useful, then inevitable. But *The Corrections* is no more a paean to his and Enid Lambert's generation than it is to their children's. The senior Lamberts are decent and loyal people. But they are also bigoted, repressed and traditional—the father a tyrant, the mother a dizzy optimist. Franzen does not withhold his characteristic sympathy from them, but nor does he spare them his analysis.

The *Corrections* is such a thorough, honest and scrupulously realistic novel that few have noticed there is something very curious about the Lamberts. To discover it requires doing a little math. Alfred is 79 years old for most of the novel, and Enid is 73. Their eldest child is 45, their youngest 32. This means that these overwhelmingly conventional Midwesterners only began to have children when the wife was 28 and the husband 34, and continued having them until she was 43 and he 49: nothing impossible, but certainly unusual for people of their demographic. A recent *New Yorker* essay by Franzen implies that the Lamberts are based in part on his own family, where

the generations may have been just as widely spaced. In any case, the structure of the fictional family has allowed him to write a novel of generational conflict in which a crucial, intervening generation is missing—namely, the people who came of age in the '60s and early '70s. There were certainly apolitical hippies, and fanatically anti-hippie radicals, but for a few years a good portion of the American left embodied a promise, entirely absent from the pages of *The Corrections*, of a life both ethical and devoted to pleasure.

Since then the dream of personal happiness has become captive to the market while the left has wounded itself with its well-founded pessimism and grief. Franzen's neat, local solution to the problem is to have concocted an exceptionally bitter pill that is nevertheless a pleasure to swallow: A harrowing tale of boom-time depression animated by rich, old-fashioned characterization and plotting. He should have exulted when Oprah chose to give her imprimatur to *The Corrections*. Who but Chip Lambert was going to tell Oprah's fans that "the for-profit nation-state, with a globally dispersed citizenry of shareholders, is the next stage in the evolution of political economy"? What other page-turner were they going to read that superimposes the most novel features of our consumer environment on the most ancient relationships—those between husband and wife, parent and child?

There is a certain genius in writing a novel equally about consumerism and family life. The ability to choose among available products, the endless expansion of discretionary income, is the consumer ideal. In a consumer society, to belong to a family is therefore the ultimate affront: We did not choose these people. Perhaps then the exaltation of the family, universal across the political spectrum, needn't be so reactionary after all—not if in its small way that obdurate and unprofitable institution is an example of the limits of capital and the necessity of the pursuit of happinesses other than one's own. Maybe this is the use of unhappy families, each unhappy in its own way. ■

Benjamin Kunkel also writes for *Dissent* and the *Los Angeles Times*.

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The Lonely Tribune

By Matthew Price

In his 1944 essay on Arthur Koestler, George Orwell penned an evocative portrait of a special kind of political writer, one who had emerged during the tense decades of the '20s and '30s. "Most of [them]," he wrote, "have been obliged to break the law in order to engage in politics at all; some of them have thrown bombs and fought in

Victor Serge: The Course Is Set on Hope

By Susan Weissman
Verso
364 pages, \$35

street battles, many have been in prison or the concentration camp, or fled across frontiers with false names and forged passports."

They inhabited and wrote about a "special world created by secret police forces, censorship of opinion, torture and frame up trials." They opposed not only fascism, but left-wing totalitarianism. Most (but not all) had been members of various Communist parties, but had broken away after the rise of Stalin. Against a torrent of propaganda, double-dealing, bad faith, vituperative epithets and cynical lies, they produced, as Orwell pungently noted, "unofficial history, the kind that is ignored in the text books and lied about in newspapers."

We are well acquainted with the writers of this school: André Malraux, Ignazio Silone, Koestler and Orwell himself. Their careers and ideological journeys are well known and written about, but perhaps none were so remarkable as Victor Serge, who knew well what he once called the "concentration camp world." Pamphleteer, novelist, poet, polemicist, humanist and a revolutionary to his bones, Serge set up permanent camp where art and politics meet. In his numerous novels, journalism and history writing, he charted an entire era of revolution and reaction, from the tumultuous early days of the Russian Revolution to the crushing tyranny of Stalin. He spent a

lifetime grappling with the consequences of that revolution, first as participant, then as dissident.

One of the earliest users of the word "totalitarian," Serge stood against the twin menaces of fascism and Stalinism. But unlike Koestler, Serge never traded in his revolutionary credentials to join the shrill chorus of the professional anti-communists; he hewed to his own stubborn brand of revolutionary politics until his death. He remained, by his own characterization, an "intransigent."

His life reads like a political thriller. A participant in three different revolutionary struggles—Spanish, Russian, German—Serge was many times jailed, interned and deported for his political activities. A Comintern secret agent in the early '20s, he fell out with the Bolsheviks. Harried by Stalin, hunted by his agents, he was a lonely, isolated

**Novelist or
historian, poet
or revolutionary,
Victor Serge lived
where art and
politics meet.**



figure in the '30s, abused by fellow-traveling Western intellectuals for his anti-Stalinism. As Susan Weissman writes in her new biography, "His life was spent in permanent political opposition. Serge opposed capitalism—first as an anarchist, then as a Bolshevik. He opposed Bolshevism's undemocratic practices and then opposed Stalin as a Left Oppositionist. He argued with Trotsky from within the anti-Stalinist left; and he opposed fascism and capitalism's Cold War as an unrepentant revolutionary Marxist."

A biography of Serge is long overdue. Though Weissman clearly knows the material—her book is exhaustively researched—it is ungainly in form and graceless in style. Still, she clearly has an impassioned devotion to her subject,

and one hopes this book will go some way to restore Serge to the canon of great 20th-century political writers.

Born Victor Lvovich Kibalchich in 1890 in Brussels to Russian exiles, the young Serge learned revolutionary politics at his parents' knee. He moved to Paris at 18, continuing his political education and voracious reading, living life on the margins and consorting with, as he described it, "a vast world of irregulars, outcasts, paupers and criminals." His ties to a violent anarchist group brought him trouble, and he was tried and sentenced to five years in prison. In 1917, he was released and thrown out of the country; eventually he made his way across Europe to the newly formed Soviet Union in 1919.

Weissman pays little attention to Serge's early years, which are chronicled in his *Memoirs*, one of the most remarkable documents of political activity ever written. Rather, she is largely preoccupied with his role in the formation of the Soviet Union and the complex, often bewildering political groupings and factional disputes of its early years.

Serge arrived in Petrograd (St. Petersburg) as civil war raged. The city lay besieged, and hunger was everywhere—"The metropolis of Cold, of Hunger, of Hatred and of Endurance," as he described it. He cast his lot with the Bolsheviks, and fought in the defense of the city. Nonetheless, he remained a steadfast and independent critic of their authoritarianism and paranoia. He attacked the secret police force, the Cheka (forerunner of the murderous NKVD) as "one of the gravest and impermissible errors that the Bolshevik leaders committed in 1918."

In his writings, Serge wrestled with the tormenting question: Was Bolshevism inherently prone to tyranny or was it open to democratic freedoms? "I thought of the Revolution as a tremendous sacrifice that was required for the future's sake," Serge wrote, "and nothing seemed to me more essential than to sustain, or rescue, the spirit of liberty within it." For Serge, this would be an abiding preoc-

cupation: how to maintain both freedom and a commitment to the planned vision of a socialist society.

He was critical of revolutionary terror, but reluctantly conceded that something had to be done about the counter-revolution then in full sway and the capitalist powers hostile to the Soviet Union and communism. As Lenin and the Bolsheviks consolidated power, eliminating their enemies to the right, Serge moved through the ranks. He helped organize the Comintern and was dispatched to Berlin in 1923, where he witnessed the dying revolutionary struggles of the German left. From his posts in Berlin and then Vienna, he watched with growing alarm the increasing repression under the Bolsheviks, and the power struggles within the party after Lenin's death. Weissman's account of these years are learned, though daunting: Readers should be well acquainted with Soviet history if they want to keep up.

Serge returned to the Soviet Union in 1926, and took part in intra-party struggles, joining with the so-called Left Oppositionists, who wanted to reclaim the revolution from Stalin's repressive bureaucratic stranglehold. The air was full of loud debates over points of socialist doctrine; Stalin and Trotsky were maneuvering for power. Left Opposition activities were gradually curtailed, its theorists spied on, jailed, tried and shot.

Serge himself was banned from the party in 1928, when he took up writing, composing a remarkable series of novels that he secreted out of the country to his friends in France, who got them published. Miraculously, Serge remained at tenuous liberty until he too fell afoul of the secret police; he was arrested and exiled to Central Asia, where he nearly starved to death. Friends in the West noisily clamored for his release. The Soviet authorities consented to his freedom in 1936, but at a price: They stripped his citizenship, seized his manuscripts and expelled him from the country.

He returned first to Brussels, and then to Paris, where he worked with POUM, the party of independent Marxists that Orwell fought alongside in Spain, and campaigned against the Moscow show trials. Despite the near

universal calumny visited on him in the Communist-dominated left-wing press, he wrote on: An unceasing torrent of essays, pamphlets and polemics streamed forth from his pen—analyses of Trotsky, Stalinism, capitalism, fascism, bureaucratic collectivism, all forceful documents of “unofficial history.” He was critical of the cult of the leader, whether Stalin or Trotsky, thus alienating himself from the two main currents of the left. Consigned to fringe publications, his audience was limited. Few wanted to listen to him. He was a lonely tribune.

Though Weissman quotes at length from his voluminous political writings, she seems uninterested in his novels, which are lost classics of political literature. Serge was hardly a conventional novelist; he thought the classic realism of the bourgeois novel was spent, inadequate to the age. By his own admission, “individual existences were of no interest to me—particularly my own—except by virtue of the great ensemble of life whose particles, more or less endowed with consciousness, are all that we ever are.”

Serge's first novels have a frenzied quality, written as they were under great pressure and threat of seizure and censorship. In the early '30s, he wrote in quick succession a series of novels that grapple with the dialectic of victory and defeat: *Men in Prison*, a rough-hewn, nearly characterless study of confinement; *Birth of Our Power*, a harrowing progression of the wretched political outcasts across Europe; and the lyrically documentary *Conquered City*, a Dos Passos-inspired anatomy of Petrograd rent by revolutionary terror and strife, full of stark evocations of shabbiness, desolation, crushed hopes and vain struggles.

In this passage, here are the first signs of the choking bureaucracy that Serge fought against, but also the frenzied energy expended on the gigantic project of reorganizing society:

Other oases of electricity burning from dusk to dawn: the Committees. Committees of Three, of Five, of Seven, of Nine, the Enlarged Committees, the Extraordinary Committees, the Permanent,

Temporary, Special Subaltern, Superior, Supreme Committees deliberating on the problem of nails, on the manufacture of coffins, on the education of pre school children, on the slaughter of starving horses, on the struggle against scurvy, on the intrigues of the anarchists, on agitation and propaganda, on road transport, on the stocking of women's hats after the nationalization of small businesses.

But it is in his remarkable novel of the purges and show trials of the '30s, *The Case of Comrade Tulayev*—a novel unjustly overshadowed by Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*—that Serge's talents are in full bloom. The book is a deranged symphony of voices, characters, run-on sentences, a vast panorama of Party members and hangers-on caught up in a vortex of charge and countercharge as Stalin and his lackeys annihilate the last of the old Bolsheviks. Written in the last years of Serge's life, as he sought a final sanctuary in Mexico after fleeing the Nazis, he wrote it “for the desk drawer,” as it had little hope of being published. He spent his last years still writing, still thinking. He corresponded with Orwell and Dwight Macdonald (Serge wrote for Macdonald's journal *Politics*), both of whom tried to find publishers for his work. He died in 1947, poor and penniless.

In one of Serge's obituaries, a writer observed that “his *chef-d'oeuvre* was his own life.” In 1942, he wrote an essay for *Partisan Review*, reflecting movingly on his career, its crushed expectations and renewed hopes. Were one to pluck words from the thousands and thousands he wrote, these might capture his essence:

Our salvation lies in a tolerant intransigence which recognizes in each other the right to error, that most human of rights, and each other's right to *think otherwise*. ... We have caught a glimpse of man resolving his own history. And we have known how to win, we must never forget that. This experiment of ours will not be wasted. Beaten yes, but our spirit is strong. We are on the eve of *tomorrow*. ■

Matthew Price is a writer in New York.

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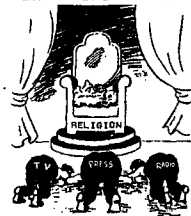
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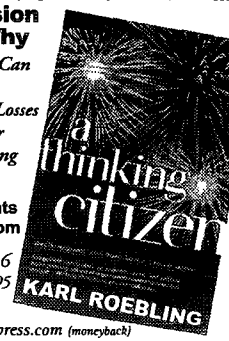
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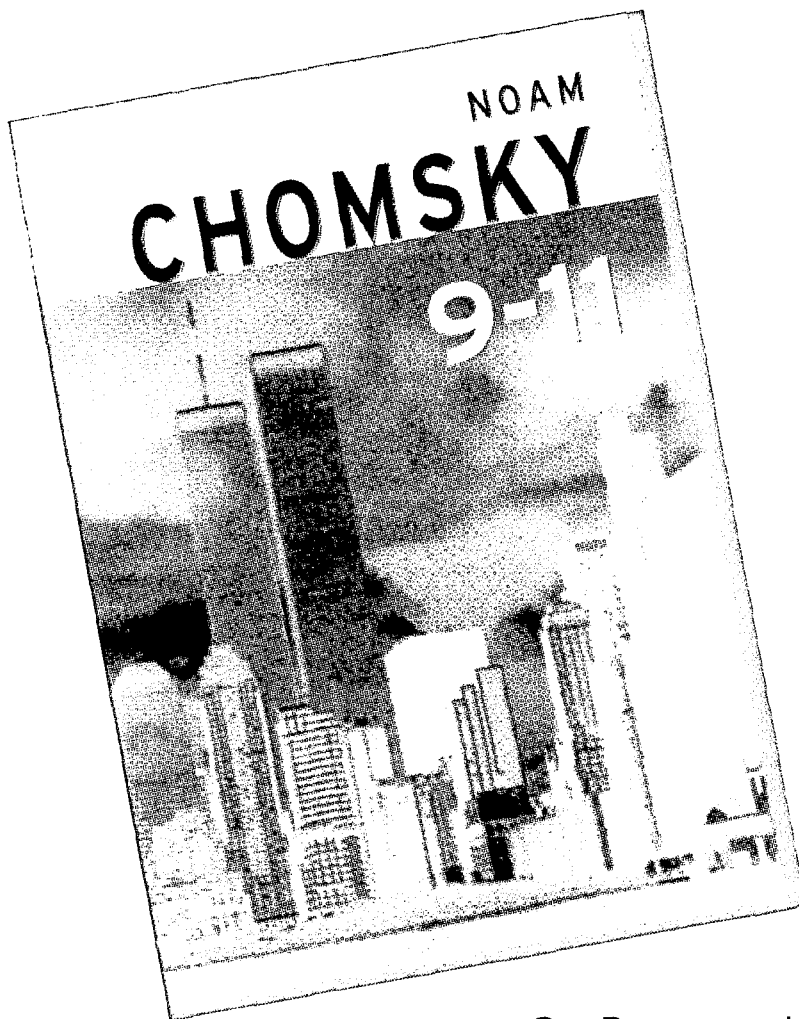
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